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

How to Fight COVID-19 and Fascism - Page 4
A Tale of Two Coups - Page 7
United Front vs. Popular Front - Page 44
Science, Philosophy and Marxist Dialectical Thinking - Page 48
On February 3, 2021, the Philadelphia District Attorney, Larry Krasner, submitted a 96-page brief to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that argued to “affirm the orders denying post-conviction relief” to Mumia Abu-Jamal.

In crass violation of the official role of a District Attorney to seek truth and justice (as opposed to seeking or upholding convictions,) the brief shows the extreme lengths the D.A.’s team went through to argue Mumia’s guilt and to ignore all pertinent facts in court records proving his innocence.

Recently, during the impeachment trial of ex-President Trump, the country witnessed the kinds of shenanigans lawyers can engage in to make arguments for untenable, illegal actions. (For example, Trump’s defense lawyers, in an effort to exonerate him from inciting the murderous assault on the Capitol, showed a long video collage of Trump’s opponents using the word “fight” without any context of what fight they were advocating.)

D.A. Krasner’s brief is likewise full of lawyers’ word games all to endorse the previous racist court decisions framing Mumia Abu-Jamal for the murder of Police officer, Daniel Faulkner, a murder to which another man admitted guilt!

One example is the repeated denial in the D.A.’s brief that Mumia’s appeals were submitted in a “timely” fashion—a condition that is not possible until new facts are revealed.

This brief represents a serious setback to Mumia and the movement to win his freedom. It is proof that it is illusory to have any faith in the bourgeois state or its “progressive” agents—or that meaningful reform of a racist, unjust criminal justice system, can come from within. For justice to be won, a mass movement must be mobilized to demand it.

To learn the truth about this very important case read “Path to Mumia’s Freedom,” by Rachel Wolkenstein, a former attorney for Mumia, at rachel-wolkenstein.net and see the excellent video, “Manufacturing Guilt—a short film about Mumia Abu-Jamal’s case” directed by Stephen Vittoria, on YouTube or at laboractionmumia.org website.

White Riots at the Center of Empire

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

With the rise of the Trump Presidency, few events were more remarkable than the 2017 white nationalist rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia. Here we saw the naked face of white hatred, fear and anxiety, seemingly inspired by a presidency brought lately into being in part, by the false claim that the nations’ first Black president wasn’t born in the U.S.

Who could guess that less than four years later, another white riot would erupt, this time at the nation’s Capitol, the halls of Congress, where yet another false claim, that of a stolen election, would provide the spark to a flame of insurrection?

These two furious events form bookends of time, a four-year period of a presidential term, marking malice unleashed by Trump.

They also provide insight into white entitlement, the deep-seated belief that public space is white space.

They attacked the Capitol in the light of day, shattering windows and crashing through doors. They beat cops like drums, whipped them with sticks, stolen batons and flagpoles, and dragged them down steps.

And did so on camera!

One cop who was later interviewed said he was being assaulted at the Capitol by protesters who said they liked and supported police, especially during summer conflicts with groups like Black Lives Matter. The cop remarked that many of the Capitol protesters suffered from “cognitive dissonance!”

But guess what? Among those attacking Congress were active duty and retired cops from across America. Amazing!

Trump played the role of America’s Caligula. The Roman Emperor, (37-41 AD). Vain, petty, cruel, egotistic, mean, who strived to humiliate Roman Senators, who hated those who would not worship him, ruled for four years, until his armed guards dispatched him.

King Trump waged war against Congress and earned himself his second impeachment for “incitement to insurrection.”

—Prison Radio, January 15, 2021
Prisonradio.org

Write to Mumia at:
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Mumia Abu-Jamal #AM-8335
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St. Petersburg, FL 33733
CONTENTS

U.S. and World Politics

Philadelphia DA Launches New Attack on Mumia Abu-Jamal .................. 2
By Carole Seligman

White Riots at the Center of Empire .......... 2
By Mumia Abu-Jamal

How to Fight COVID-19 and Fascism .......... 4
By Bonnie Weinstein

A Tale of Two Coups .................. 7
By Chris Kinder

White Settler Uprising at the Capitol .......... 10
By Glen Ford

Nightmare Years .................. 13
By Glen Ford

Key Lessons of a Failed Insurrection ........ 15
By Malik Miah and Barry Sheppard

Attempted Insurrection Fails ........... 19
By Malik Miah and Barry Sheppard

It’s Up to Workers to Defang the Fascists .... 22
By Freedom Socialist Party

Storming Congress: Don’t be Shocked ........ 23
Statement by the United Front Committee for Labor Party

The Electoral College Must Go .......... 25
By Kevin Cooper

The Pardoning of Blackwater Killers .......... 28
By Richard Becker

Richest 500 Add $1.8 Trillion to Their Wealth in 2020 . 30
By Julia Conley

Zombie Capitalism .................. 31
By Dr. Nayvin Gordon

The Working Class: Robbed, Poisoned, and Killed . 32
By Dr. Nayvin Gordon

Farmers’ Protest in India .................. 33
By Colin Todhunter

Food Fight in India .................. 36
By Arshad M. Khan

Eighty Israeli Teens Refuse to Serve in Army .......... 37
By Oren Ziv

2021 Shministiyot Letter .................. 39
By W.T. Whitney

We Don’t Need New Domestic Terrorism Laws . . . 41
By Scott Shackford

New Anti-Protest Bills .................. 42
By Alleen Brown and Akela Lacy

United Front vs. Popular Front ........... 44
By Scott Cooper

Science, Philosophy and Marxist Dialectical Thinking . . . 48
By John Blackburn

Cuba’s COVID-19 Vaccines Serves People, Not Profits . 53
By W.T. Whitney

A Tribute to Ernie Tate .................. 55
By Phil Hearse

Incarceration Nation

Is an Innocent Man Still Languishing on Death Row? . 58
By Nicholas Kristof

Free Ed Poindexter .................. 61
By Michael Richardson

The Prosecution and Persecution of Julian Assange . . 62
By Cliff Conner

Starving for COVID Relief .................. 64
By Kevin “Rashid” Johnson

Letter to the Editors .................. 65
Fighting to Win .................. 67
Editorial by Carole Seligman

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Workers all over the world are suffering needlessly from massive unemployment, racism, sexism, vast economic inequality and an environmental crisis due to capitalist production methods that put profits above everything else. And now, all these crises are compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The private accumulation of obscene amounts of wealth for the tiny few—wealth created by workers who are paid as little as the capitalists can get away with while keeping all the profits for themselves—is endemic to capitalism. The quest for more and increasing rates of profits are the cause of all the crisis humanity faces today—from poverty to war and environmental destruction.

The competitive nature of capitalist economics inhibits progress

The pharmaceutical companies are in fierce competition for the massive profits to be gained by selling their own COVID-19 vaccine—or any of the medications or treatments they happen to produce. These privately-owned corporations’ modus operandi is to keep secrets from one another. Logically, cooperating with each other and freely sharing research and information would be the most expedient way to go. But for their “bottom line,” being the first on the market and producing the most in the shortest amount of time pays off in the billions. This is why they have been so inept at providing personal protective equipment, developing and distributing the vaccines, finding a cure for COVID-19—or cancer and other life-threatening illnesses.

What we are up against

In addition to the pandemic, we are experiencing deaths from murderous storms from deep freezes to deadly heatwaves, melting glaciers and dams breaking and washing away everything in their path—all due to global warming caused by careless capitalist production.

Oil spills, toxic pollution, poisonous and contaminated food production are a daily occurrence. Our infrastructure is collapsing due to governmental dereliction, and on a world scale, the destruction brought about by never-ending war waged across the globe by the U.S. and U.S.-supported allies.

Homelessness, poverty and food insecurity are everywhere. There is a worldwide crisis in public education and healthcare. Public education has all but been dismantled during this pandemic.

How capitalism stands in the way

Capitalist production is based upon the profit motive—production for profit for the few—not for the needs and wants of humanity and life on the planet.

Capitalism is a highly inefficient system because the profit motive overrides considerations of health, safety and durability of products and the safety of how they are produced both for the environment and for workers.

Capitalists only produce products if they can design them to self-destruct. It’s called “built-in obsolescence.” This means that corporations hire scientists to engineer products that only last a specific amount of time and are very costly to repair, so it’s cheaper to replace them. It is a vastly underestimated cause of the massive amounts of garbage, pollution and wasted natural resources—but a prime source of capitalist profits.

Capitalist production methods are designed for expediency—fast assembly lines, cheap labor and plenty of cheap materials and energy resources.
Capitalism has no borders. The world’s cheap labor and resources—no matter which country they are located in—are theirs for the taking.

Law and order

Capitalists need, above all, “law and order” to maintain their power. The capitalists are, after all, only a tiny minority that depends upon having weapons of mass destruction at-the-ready, that could kill hundreds-of-millions of people, if necessary, to preserve their wealth and power, and to maintain and gain more profits for themselves.

They will resort to anything, including fascism as a last resort. Divide and conquer is the way capitalism rules—and fascism is its ultimate expression.

What is fascism?

Words are important and Adolf Hitler was one who took advantage of the fuzzy, contradictory use of the word “socialist” and those calling themselves “Social Democrats,” i.e., democratic socialists.

But Hitler was not the least interested in socialism just because he named his political party The National Socialist Party (shortened to “Nazi.”) He was aiming for its opposite—a party of a tiny minority—the captains of industry and their financiers.

This very small group financed Hitler’s adventures including the takeover of the workers’ unions, small businesses of all kinds, the German aggression of World War II, and the enslavement and mass murder of Jews, communists, trade-unionists, Roma, homosexuals, and others.

Hitler was not alone. He was preceded by Mussolini, in Italy and followed by Franco, in Spain. Not much later, the capitalists caught on and soon their tin-pot dictators were copying Hitler.

World War II was the end for Hitler but not for fascism.

Big business had long since learned how to use the trappings of bourgeois democracy to disguise their control of society and they have not been forced to take that last resort of a dictatorship of their own. They much prefer to let the little capitalists take the rap in case of trouble.

That is largely what is happening today. The big capitalists are making record profits while restaurants close, workers are laid off in huge numbers and can’t pay their rent or mortgages, landlords can’t collect rents, hardware stores are empty, and nobody is painting their houses. But all the while, the two-party system of bourgeois democracy will vote for some minimal relief measures and pretend that prosperity is just around the corner.

The capitalists will not give up the two-party system which has proven so useful for the years since the Civil War. Until the ruling class faces bankruptcy, until his wealth is threatened by an angry working class—then and only then will fascism bubble to the surface.

They will resort to anything, including fascism as a last resort. Divide and conquer is the way capitalism rules—and fascism is its ultimate expression.

The myth of good capitalists and bad capitalists

Of course, the capitalist class prefers to choose the path of least resistance by creating the myth that there are “good capitalists” and “bad capitalists” and that we workers can benefit, in the long run, by partnering with the “good capitalists” to get some of those bread-crumbs they promise to hand out if we support and fund them.

Labor unions in this country donate tens-of-millions-of-dollars to the Democratic Party—money from our union dues!

And, in order to guarantee their control over the wealth workers produce, both capitalist parties give full support to the police and the military.

Fascism, backed by the military and police, are capitalism’s “ace in the hole.” And they will use fascism and war to maintain their power at any cost if workers don’t recognize that it’s the system of capitalism itself that is the problem and at the root of war and fascism.

To defeat fascism, the working class must unite and organize to disarm the fascists and their capitalist generals, end capitalism, and build a socialist society based upon production for need and want—not profit.

It will take an organized, independent, working class movement to confront and defeat fascism when the capitalist class decides it has become a necessary tool to their continued dictatorship over the working class.

What next for organized labor?

Organized labor has put all their eggs into the basket of “partnership” with liberal capitalists. Here in the U.S. that means partnership with, and support to, the Democratic Party. The organized labor leadership here in the U.S. overwhelmingly supported a vote for Biden over Trump.

Biden won, and we are still waiting for a COVID-19 stimulus relief package—a piddling $1400 if we’re lucky, while, already this year the billionaires raked in extra billions in profits in a few short months.

And now the Democrats have the majority in both the House and the Senate, yet they still won’t pass the kind of relief that’s so desperately and urgently needed because of this pandemic!

Organized labor must join together now to demand the kind of relief pack-
age that workers really need—and not just a “relief package”—but a real living wage, universal healthcare, comfortable housing, food security, all of which are basic human rights. This is the kind of struggle that will unite the working class into the power we need to end the threat of war and fascism and realize our common goals.

How to win social and economic equality and defeat the rise of fascism

Capitalist economic inequality and injustice fuels divisions among workers. It encourages scapegoating, racism, sexism—bigotry of all kinds—because that weakens and discourages unity, understanding and solidarity between the masses who so vastly outnumber the capitalist class.

A movement strong enough to defeat fascism must be based upon, and organized by, the whole labor movement acting in unity and solidarity, and independently of, and in direct opposition, to the capitalist class in a working-class struggle for liberty, equality and justice for all.

What to do first

The U.S. labor movement is in an ideal position to launch a massive campaign for COVID-19 relief to last until the pandemic is over. The health and safety of the masses of workers should be their prime concern now.

At the very least the labor movement could form a united front to demand that the military budget be turned into a vast COVID-19 relief budget. That would provide plenty of money to permanently forgive rent, mortgage, utility, education, healthcare and credit payments, to provide unemployment benefits equaling full pay, provide housing, food and healthcare—and all other basic necessities—for as long as the pandemic continues.

Tens-of-millions of workers are set to become homeless. There are no good-paying jobs to be had and parents—especially single parents—have no childcare making them unable to work even if there were jobs.

Testing and vaccines are still not available to most people not to speak of the vast lack of healthcare across the country in general.

The police are still murdering mostly people of color on a daily basis. This has not stopped and will not stop until we stop it!

These are the gripping issues of the day and rallying around these issues now will resonate with all working people.

The current organized labor leadership is locked into partnership with the Democratic Party. This “partnership” has resulted in the decimation of organized labor over the years to a fraction of what it was.

Labor blueprint for the future

Launching an organized labor campaign for COVID-19 relief could lead the working class to victory not only for pandemic relief, but would serve as a blueprint for how to win a world that will support a thriving, plentiful, peaceful, cooperative and just society in the interests of all.

Workers need an independent, democratically structured, party of our own that will fight in the interests of the entire working class in direct opposition to capitalists and the parties that represent them.

Through a democratic and united labor struggle for pandemic relief, we can show the real strength and power the working class has to change the world for the benefit of all and to transform the economic structure of society to serve the needs of humanity and the planet, not the private profits of the few.

Fully organized and working together for immediate and vitally necessary demands during this pandemic can lead to a new, independent, democratically organized, working-class party with a program and strategy for achieving socialism, and deliver a death blow to war, exploitation and fascism forever.
A Tale of Two Coups
By Chris Kinder

First question: What was the real nature of the January 6th attack on the U.S. capital? Many theories have been bandied about, but the truth is not that hard to find. This was a gasping, final, and doomed episode in Donald Trump’s pathetic attempt to retain power by overturning one of the most honest elections in recent U.S. history. If successful, this would have installed a dictatorship by an ignorant moron. Trump’s coup attempt was prepared for by his endlessly-repeated trope that he could only be defeated by a rigged election. His mouthings of this nonsense started as early as May 2020!

That he could only lose through fraud, and then that he really “won” the election was of course a bold-faced lie, which everyone knows, including Trump himself. The election was the most honest in recent history, because it was dominated by paper ballots that were mailed in. Thank the pandemic for this. With easily-rigged voting machines, Trump would have fraudulently “won,” just as Bush did in 2000.

Trump sought to save himself
Trump did all this—including the 06 January attack on Congress—to save his own persona, which is a construct of fake news, illegal schemes and self-serving fantasies; and for his hoped-for freedom from imprisonment for endless financial and other crimes over decades, which now threaten him. His political ambitions are just a cover, albeit an important one, for his own personal salvation.

The January 6th attack on Congress was known to its organizers to be illegal as soon as the march began. Investigative reporter Greg Palast revealed the original permit for the rally on the Ellipse, which was obtained by Women for America First. The permit “does not authorize a march from the Ellipse,” and the WAF was “stunned” by Trump’s call at the rally for a march on the capital. Ali Alexander, a rightist demagogue, led the march with White House approval, even though the president knew, and he was warned that it would be illegal.¹

The core of the coup attempt
Trump was able to bring off the DC attack because he had energized and mobilized a movement which combined hard-right organizations with the rightist majority in the Republican Party, which latched onto Trump’s ability to mobilize a base with his populist twitter-babble. At the core of the attack on Congress were well-organized fascist organizations, such as the Proud Boys—first to break in—and the Oath Keepers, 3-Percenters and a few others, which all have roots that go deep into the racist history of the U.S.

These hard rightists had specific targets in their cross-hairs—Speaker Pelosi, Vice President Pence, Alexandra Orcasio Cortez. Senators and House members had to run for their lives. Cortez had to hide in a bathroom.

A new and more dangerous right
The immediate predecessor of these fascist groups is the Ku Klux Klan, which implemented and enforced slavery by another name—a condition of continued Black servitude that lasted for close to a century after the Civil War. Now, preventing Blacks from voting is the core goal of this Trump-GOP-fascist lash-up. This explains why GOP-controlled “battle-ground” states are now rushing to impose all possible restrictions to voting rights, aimed chiefly at predominantly Black inner-city districts. Meanwhile, in other states where they are not threatened, these worms are supporting greater voter access.

Furthermore, the Capital riot showed that the hard right, through its link to Trump, is extending its tentacles. A demographic analysis of those arrested in connection with the capital riot pub-

February, 1, 2021, Bangkok, Thailand, National League for Democracy supporters in Bangkok are protesting outside Myanmar Embassy against the military coup.
lished in The Atlantic showed that most of these activists did not come from “red” states, but “revealed a new force in American politics,” spread throughout the country. This referred to Trump voters, hard-rightists in particular, found in many counties in states that the Democrats won in the election. All this helps to explain the now deepening divide in the Republican party, which could lead to an open split between the Trump defenders—supporters of the January 6th attack on the capital—and the establishment conservatives like Senator Mitch McConnell and Trump’s recent blasting of McConnell and the censoring of the few GOP senators who voted to convict Trump in the Senate impeachment trial.

**Fascist goal—civil war**

The motivation of the fascistic groups is similar to that of the Republicans—the changing demographics of the U.S., in which white people are rapidly becoming the minority ethnicity. Whether or not they openly claim to be racists (which many do not), their goal is the same. This is the underlying basis of the insurrectionists’ claim that the election was “stolen” if their side didn’t win; and it leads to the same goal, whether acknowledged or not—prevent Black people from voting.

It is no accident that the insurrection attempt featured images based on the “Don’t Tread On Me” slogan from the U.S. War of Independence, or the slogan seen displayed at the capital revolt: “1776.” The Confederacy in the Civil War of 1860-65, which many of these rightists look to, also claimed the legacy of 1776 as their own. The so-called “Revolution” of that date was made by slave-owners to preserve their right to human property, and its post-civil war legacy of voter suppression and segregation of Blacks continued well into the 20th Century. It continues today in the prison-industrial-complex, and on-going racism nation-wide.

**The military coup in Myanmar**

Second question: What was the nature of the military coup in Myanmar, and how does it relate to U.S. politics today? The military of Myanmar (Burma), which has ruled that country on and off since it ceased to be a British colony in 1948, grabbed its direct control back from the elected government on February first of this year. The generals’ public excuse for this came straight out of the Trump playbook: the other party stole the election—for which there is no evidence—so we had to take power to preserve “democracy.”

The overwhelming electoral victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD)—Aung San Suu Kyi’s party—prompted this. That, in turn, demands an explanation. Not only did the military have a party in the election—it had control of 25 percent of the seats in parliament automatically, and veto power, as specified in the constitution. The additional seats are what the military lost in the election, which prompted the coup.

At this writing, the population of Myanmar—including many of the ethnic minorities—is massively voting with their feet in officially-banned demonstrations to show what they think about this. Staff at dozens of hospitals, as well as students and teachers, have walked out; they were some of the first to hit the streets.

**Burmesse history of struggle**

Burma is a country composed of numerous and historically often warring ethnicities, many of whom had no interest in uniting in one nation. With a long history of kingdoms behind it, Burma was conquered and turned into one colony by the British in three wars in the 19th Century. This in turn produced a vigorous independence movement. Just prior to the devastating Japanese occupation of Burma in World War II, an independence army was pulled together by a general named Aung San. He became the founder of modern Myanmar, and he was Aung San Suu Kyi’s father.

With its independence in 1948, Burma became a country which still had often hostile ethnic minority groups, a situation created by the British imperial occupiers, by forcing various ethnic groups into one nation, just as they had done to India, Pakistan, Palestine and other former colonies. Released from a 15-year house arrest in 2010, Aung San Suu Kyi’s “democratic” NLD government came into existence, with the military’s permission in 2015. As the effective head of government, she allied with the military in its devastating suppression of the Rohingya ethnic minority in Rakhine State, which justifiably wrecked her international reputation.

Third Question: Where is the U.S. ruling class in all this? Did they want Trump? Do they want fascism? Did they support the coup in Myanmar? Working backward, while the U.S. did not engineer the coup in Myanmar, it insists on domination of the entire planet, and that includes critical interests regarding Myanmar, which, in a single word, means China.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 abolished the old regime, including the big landlords and all the imperialist enclaves and capitalism that went with them. In 1950, Burma became the first non-communist country in the world to recognize the new Chinese government. At that time China was still fighting the Kuomintang—Chiang Kai Shek’s reactionary and U.S.-backed, drug-running army—part of which was holed-up in northern Burma. That was at the start of the Korean War; so just as they had made their revolution, the Chinese people faced a war on two fronts, both involving the U.S. and its allies.

**The Pacific Pivot**

The U.S.’ current “pivot” to Asia (also known as the Pacific Pivot) is
nothing new. Domination of the Pacific Ocean and the access to China was so important to the U.S. after the Japanese surrender in World War II that it attempted to keep its armed forces in the Pacific on duty and “in theater” in order to be able to intervene in the ongoing civil war in China, to keep it from going communist. This outrage was met by a surge of protest—essentially an uprising—of U.S. soldiers and sailors all over the bases in the Pacific demanding to be sent home immediately. The U.S. rulers, temporarily defeated by these protests then, have not forgotten their anti-communist imperialist goals.

In Myanmar today, China sees a very important defensive advantage against the U.S.—expansion of the Belt and Road project. The U.S. “pivot” policy, declared central under the Obama administration, involved increased U.S. naval presence in the South China Sea to challenge the Chinese. Look at this in perspective: if a substantial and nuclear-armed navy of China was to patrol U.S. waters off the coast of the U.S., threatening to obstruct commercial and military traffic, and challenge its rights to islands off the coast, what would the U.S. do?

China’s moves are defensive

China is not doing anything to obstruct freedom of international navigation in these waters. It claims some islands as a defensive move against the U.S., and it seeks to keep navigation open. But China fears that the U.S. will choke off this avenue for its navigation. This is where the Chinese relationship with Myanmar, and the Belt and Road project, comes in.

The Belt and Road project is an attempt to expand and secure all the venues of the Silk Road, which was (and still is) the ancient overland trade route between Europe and Asia. Its name, made famous by the 13th Century Venetian merchant and adventurer Marco Polo, refers to the ancient and medieval exportation of silk and other commodities from China to Europe. Today, the Belt and Road seeks to strengthen this connection through both overland routes and sea lanes. This project is for China a defensive move against the U.S.’ endless pursuit of “full spectrum dominance.”

Myanmar’s importance to the Belt and Road

Myanmar is important because it offers China an ally to circumvent the sea routes which are threatened by U.S. naval harassment. These include the South China Sea, and the Strait of Malacca, which is one of the most important international sea trade routes, lying between the Malaysian peninsula and Indonesia. A U.S. naval ship was involved in a collision with another ship recently in this narrow passageway. China rightly worries that the U.S. is determined to choke off both of these avenues in its cold war against China.

China, among its other investments in Myanmar, has interests in a deep-water port project in Kyaukpyu, on the northwestern coast of Myanmar, which will be important for China to bypass the trade routes through the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca. Meanwhile, Aung San Suu Kyi, as a virtual head of state, has been moving close to China. In January of 2020, she met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on a visit to Myanmar, in which they signed several agreements designed to facilitate relations which are critical to China’s Belt and Road project. This signaled a warning to the military that their hold on power in Myanmar was slipping away. The election defeat, and the example of Trump’s coup attempt based on false claims of fraud in the U.S. election, triggered the February 1st coup in Myanmar.

The two coups—Trump’s that failed miserably, and Myanmar’s that unseated Suu Kyi—are both examples, in different ways, of the U.S. ruler’s need for world dominance. To the ruling class, world domination—the success of U.S. imperialism everywhere—is the issue that is absolutely central. It is the key to their ability to keep wages low domestically, have safe places to invest in and shift production to, as well as keep free-trade rules in place, and maintain the military-industrial complex.

“America is back”

Just after his inauguration, President Biden said, “America is back.” By immediately putting the neocons—the policy gurus of U.S. world domination—back in office, he showed what that meant to the world: they never really left. The fact of having an ignorant moron who didn’t know what he was doing in the White House was the main problem that the ruling class had with Trump. Now, Biden has put people like Antony Blinken, Victoria Nuland, and China hawk, Kurt Campbell, among others, in cabinet and other important positions. Campbell, the author of The Pivot, the Future of American Statecraft in Asia, who was important in the Obama administration, is now to lead Biden’s Asia policy as a special advisor in the National Security Council.

Why is world domination the most essential goal for U.S. imperialism? Because, for the oligarchs, this is the essential foundation of everything they need to survive. Climate change? They can deal. Their corporations cannot stop climate change, but they can look like they are trying, while keeping control of the market, and profiting off new technologies. General Motors just announced it will go all electric by 2035, for instance. Immigration? They don’t care, as long as their access to cheap labor is maintained, which after NAFTA and the flight of U.S. industries, is pretty well locked up. Systemic racism? Again, they don’t care as long as the effects of this system—which they created—continue to keep people divided against one another, while
making them look good with some small reforms.

The working class must rise up

The working class is also locked up, in an endless cycle of low wages or no jobs, declined or non-existent unions, and the virtually world-wide absence of any sort of revolutionary working-class movement, particularly in the U.S. Escalating automation with things like driverless trucks, and computerized port operations without dock workers will help keep the working class desperate and fearful.

Not surprisingly, bourgeois politicians in the “two-party system,” albeit with some whining perhaps, shovel the bourgeoisie’s excrement right along.

This is why the U.S. oligarchs, besides having no interest in pimples like Trump, also have no interest at this time in a hard-right or fascist movement. There is simply no substantial threat to their rule under the two party “democratic” system. The hard right is, for now, just interference on their screen. The bourgeoisie generally prefers this sort of fake democracy, as long as it doesn’t challenge their rule, because it masks their rule. It misdirects complaints against what they are doing into debates over differing “policy” decisions by a bunch of competing stage actors. When the curtains close, the audience is left with... the results of an election held on the stage.

The small fascist groups enlivened under Trump will still be a danger in coming years. They have a long history in the roots of racism in the U.S. and have secured a voice and leadership position in the large mass of both middle-class and working-class whites who are suffering under capitalism, but currently deluded by the orange-man huckster. Leon Trotsky, a key leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and an inspiration to revolutionaries then and now, said, after the rise to power of Hitler’s German Nazis, “The working class will rise again.” Now, we need the working class to rise in a revolutionary movement before the fascists get stronger. Forward to a world free of racism, fascism, and world domination by imperialist capitalism!

3 The name “Burma” derives from the language of the dominant ethnic group, and goes back generations; while “Myanmar” is the name in English adopted by the military after they slaughtered thousands in a popular uprising in 1989. Very disgusting indeed, but “Myanmar” has since become the common usage.
4 Suu Kyi is not allowed to officially hold office due to a constitutional technicality based on her marriage to a non-citizen.
5 The bulk of the Kuomintang fled to the island of Taiwan, where they slaughtered natives. Taiwan is claimed by China and was Chinese, but it had been ceded to Japan by the emperor of China in a late 19th Century capitulation, and then occupied by Japan during the Second World War.

White Settler Uprising at the Capitol

By Glen Ford

The January 6, 2021 assault on the Capitol was essentially a race riot, the product of white racial grievance.

“If it can happen in the United States, it can happen anywhere,” wrote New York Times Berlin bureau chief Katrin Bennhold, purporting to sum up world leaders’ reaction to the white nationalist assault on the U.S. Capitol. The truth is precisely the opposite: mob violence by white people aggrieved at perceived threats to their political hegemony due to the growing influence or presence of the Other—most often, Blacks—is trademark Americana, an historically repetitive phenomena that is, to varying degrees, also characteristic of other white settler states that share the U.S.’s genocidal history. It cannot “happen anywhere,” because similar conditions and histories do not exist everywhere. Bennhold’s interpretation of global sentiment is pure American exceptionalist propaganda—an erasure of U.S. history to project a false view of the present. (In fact, the only world semi-notable who mouthed words similar to Bennhold’s was former Romanian prime minister Dacian Cioloș.)

White mobs and armed groups have been inflicting violence against the non-white presence in their colonial settler state ever since their ancestors arrived on these shores. The Puritans—a colony-in-arms—had all but completed the mission of racially “purifying” New England within a century of setting foot at Plymouth Rock. Far more Native Americans were killed by massacred, armed settler civilians than by uniformed armies of the British Crown or the young U.S. republic. Whites in the slave states of the U.S. South were a people perpetually in arms in “defense” against slave rebellions, with every able-bodied white man obligated to aid in suppressing real or threatened Black revolts. Hundreds of Blacks were massacred in the wake of Nat Turner’s 1831 rebellion.

Northern white mobs also rejected the Black presence in their cities in the pre-Civil War era. Racists attempted to drive Black people out of Cincinnati, Ohio, three times: in 1829, 1836 and 1841. (In 1853 and 1855, white Cincinnati nativists also fought with German immigrants who had been influenced by revolutionary trends in Europe.)

After the Civil War, white mobs and racist armies spent 30 years subduing...
Black Reconstruction, from the New Orleans massacre of 1866\(^1\) to the armed overthrow of the Black Republican-white Populist government in Wilmington, North Carolina’s largest city, in 1898. During this period tens-of-thousands were killed—far more than the four thousand-plus Black lynching victims recorded by the great journalist/organizer Ida B. Wells.

White civilians annihilated the remaining natives of California in the gold and land rushes, and terrorized and forced the mass expulsion of Chinese from the state.

For the first 160 years of the U.S. republic’s life, the term “race riot” applied almost exclusively to white mob attacks on non-whites. Every boxing victory won by Black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson set off lethal rampages by northern and southern whites in the early years of the 20th century. The “Red Summer” of 1919, dubbed such by the Black public intellectual and activist James Weldon Johnson, saw white “race riots” in dozens of cities and the massacre of hundreds of Blacks in rural areas around Elaine, Arkansas. In Washington, DC, however, Blacks fought back, killing 15 white attackers while losing 38 to the mob. Heartened by the Black resistance to armed racist assault, Black poet and activist Claude McKay wrote the poem, If We Must Die:

“... O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!

Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!”

Just as the previous president is blamed for inciting the white mob in Washington, President Woodrow Wilson was viewed as a prime instigator of mass racist violence during his terms in the White House, including the East St. Louis riot that claimed the lives of hundreds of Black people in 1917. An arch-segregationist who introduced Jim Crow to the federal civil service, Wilson endorsed the Ku Klux Klan-glorifying film Birth of a Nation as “History written in lighting,” in 1915. The presidentially-endorsed movie ushered in a “gilded age for the Klan. In the summer of 1925, 30,000 hooded terrorists paraded in a show of force in Washington, DC.

Far more Native Americans were killed by massed, armed settler civilians than by uniformed armies of the British Crown or the young U.S. republic.

The term “race riot” was synonymous with white mob attacks against people of color until 1935, when an estimated 4,000 Blacks in Harlem, New York, took to the streets against police brutality. Harlem exploded again in 1943, for the same reasons, establishing the modern pattern of police repression/Black urban resistance. (The “Zoot Suit” riot by white servicemen and cops against Latinos in 1943 Los Angeles was a mixture of both old and new patterns of white domestic aggression.)

Police repression/Black urban resistance has become such a part of the modern American experience that white mob violence is often not characterized as a “race riot”— especially if the rioters are cops.

Race has been as central to Donald Trump’s presidency as it was to Woodrow Wilson’s, a century ago. The January 6 assault on the Capitol was essentially a race riot, the product of white racial grievance. Since 1968, the Republicans have successfully sought to position themselves as the White Man’s Party. Not since 1964 has a majority of whites voted for a Democratic presidential candidate, and Donald Trump won 57 percent of white votes last November. Having feasted on Trump’s racist “red meat” rhetoric for the past five years, the most volatile elements of the white hordes mounted an assault on the “nigger lovers,” as they used to describe people perceived as allies of Blacks, on Capitol Hill.

Of course, the U.S. Capitol is no stronghold of Black Power—the Congressional Black Caucus voted overwhelmingly to make police a protected class, in 2018, and to continue the Pentagon’s militarization of local cops, in 2014. But racists are cognitively challenged; they see phenomena that doesn’t exist, and are blind to what’s right in front of their eyes. The denizens of white settler colonies, worldwide, have always perceived their states as precarious outposts of “civilization”— a worldview that justifies any and all atrocities against the natives and imported “lesser” humans, including genocide.

Given the mass murderous record of every white settler colony on the planet—which includes all the nations of the Americas, with the possible exception of the Caribbean countries—it was surprising to find that only one recent book on Latin American white settler states turns up in a Google search engine. Richard Gott’s Latin America as a White Settler Society, published in 2007 by the Bulletin of Latin American Research, can be read at JSTOR.\(^2\) Gott sees race as central to understanding the white settler mentality, even many generations after settler arrival on foreign shores:

“A recognizable feature of all ‘settler colonial’ states is the ingrained racist fear and hatred of
the white settlers, alarmed by the continuing presence of the expropriated underclass. It is built-in to the history of the European colonial states in Africa as well as that of the antipodean colonies of Australia and New Zealand. Yet the race hatred of the settlers has only had a minor part in our traditional understanding of the drama of Latin American history and contemporary society. It is often underplayed or ignored—as it is too in the USA—and even politicians and historians of the Left have preferred to discuss class rather than race.”

In the case of the United States, American exceptionalism erases actual history and denies U.S. commonality with any other nation. New York Times reporter Katrin Bennhold can get away with pretending that the United States is both unique and a bellwether for “democracy” everywhere on the planet—which is ridiculous on its face. The events at the Capitol are absolutely consistent with racist white mob behavior throughout U.S. history, and totally understandable in the white colonial settler context. Outside of that context, these events make far less sense.

The U.S. is best understood as the first of the planet’s white colonial settler states—a species of state that includes most of the rest of the western hemisphere, Australia, New Zealand, and the last of the settler breed, Israel.

—Black Agenda Report, January 14, 2021
https://www.blackagendareport.com/white-settler-uprising-capitol

1 New Orleans massacre of 1866
The New Orleans Massacre of 1866 occurred on July 30, when a peaceful demonstration of mostly black Freedmen was set upon by a mob of white rioters, many of whom had been soldiers of the recently defeated Confederacy, to a full-scale massacre.
2 https://www.jstor.org/stable/27733923?seq=1

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In clinging to the exceptionalist fallacy that the U.S. is a model of democracy and unique in the world, rather than the end-product of colonial white settler predation, the Democrats reveal that they share much the same delusions as the flagpole-wielding Trumpsters they revile.

White mob dragging Black man from front of a bus in the 1950s.
Nightmare Years

Nightmare years will repeat themselves until the people kick out the cabal
By Glen Ford

To take on the corporate imperial racial capitalist state, we need a Black-led movement that puts politics in command and names the Democratic perpetrators and collaborators that are culpable in the unfolding, late-stage capitalist disaster.

By any objective reckoning, capitalism should have lost all vestige of legitimacy in the nightmare year 2020, when Covid-19 revealed the non-existence of a national healthcare system in the United States at precisely the historical moment when billionaire wealth exploded beyond the wildest dreams of the oligarchy. The most massive popular mobilization in U.S. history put tens-of-millions in the streets in June under the Black Lives Matter banner, proof that much more than a critical mass of the public is willing to mobilize for social justice. A Harris and Just Capital poll taken the previous month showed that only 25 percent of the public believed our current form of capitalism ensures the greater good of society—a belief gruesomely confirmed when the pandemic death toll approached half-a-million at year’s end.

So, why is there no imminent threat to the dictatorship of capital, no mass convulsion on the horizon that might bring down a system that has so demonstrably failed to provide for the health, welfare, security or happiness of the masses of people—and that allows Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, to invest tens-of-billions in disaster capitalist profits in his bid to privatize space while Americans—disproportionately Black and brown Americans—die gasping for air here on the ground?

Economic crises—or health or military catastrophes—do not automatically lead to political crises that threaten the ruling order. A transformative politics requires mass organizations that are clear on who the enemy is, and that have at least a general idea of what kind of society they want to create. If the people don’t directly challenge the oligarchy—whose wealth becomes even more concentrated during economic meltdowns—then no political crisis exists for the rulers, no matter how lethal conditions become for the majority of the population. Mobilization, by itself, is not enough if the massed millions are not consciously organized to bring down the structures at the root of their oppression—an historical fact that was reaffirmed by the failure of the mammoth protests of June to present any threat to the oligarchy that rules the United States.

It is true that, among the more politically advanced elements of the Black movement, it is increasingly understood that the enemy is racial capitalism, the only kind of capitalism that exists in both national and global terms. “You can’t have capitalism without racism,” as Malcolm X declared. But anti-capitalism, although verbally expressed throughout Black activist circles and incorporated in many group statements of principles, did not shape the demands of the movement or prevent activists from collaborating in practice with one of the two pillars of corporate rule: the Democratic Party.

More than half-a-century ago, Malcolm understood the duopoly electoral system as “foxes” (Democrats) and “wolves” (Republicans), and that “both will eat you.” And indeed, the Democratic foxes have, since Malcolm’s time, devoured the vast bulk of the community’s civic organizations, turning Black churches, sororities and fra-
ternities, and so-called “civil rights” groups into partisan annexes of the corporate duopoly. The Democratic Party, a mechanism of mass manipulation and social control, dominates every aspect of political life in Black America, blunting and negating the radical impulses of the nation’s most left-leaning, socialist-friendly polity. Thus, Black Lives Matter activists say they oppose racial capitalism but collaborate with, and base their strategies on, intimate interactions with Black operatives of the corporate political machinery: the thoroughly Democratic “Black Misleadership Class.”

“You can’t have capitalist hegemony in Black America without Black Democrats.”

Not that the movement has altered the political behavior of most Black elected officials in any substantive way. Although Black Lives Matter is a world model in confronting the police—the perennial flashpoint of Black interaction with the corporate state—Black Democratic elected officials at the national level continue to vote in lock-step with corporate Democratic leadership on militarization of local police (2014) and elevation of cops to the status of “protected class”—assault on which can now be prosecuted as a federal hate crime (2018).

The avowedly socialist, anti-imperialist, and Black self-determinationist elements within the Black Lives Matter umbrella are the best hope to lead a genuinely transformative movement in the United States—primarily because most Black Americans are peace-minded, socialism-friendly, and supportive of Black autonomy. But this can only happen if these organizations “put politics in command” and confront the enemy within: the Democratic Party, which is hegemonic in Black America.

Democratic hegemony does not mean unbeatable. The two most revered Black political icons, Malcolm and MLK, understood that you can’t effectively oppose the white oligarchs without first confronting Black Democrats, who are the ruling class’s first line of defense (and offense) in the Black community. Black Democratic mayors and councilpersons eagerly oversaw local mass Black incarceration regimes in the “chocolate cities” of the Seventies and Eighties—and called it progress. Even a narrow police and prisons abolition movement must politically defeat Black Democrats—delegitimize them—if it is to be an enduring force in the community. To grossly paraphrase Malcolm, “You can’t have capitalist hegemony in Black America without Black Democrats.” They are the enemy within.

To take on the corporate imperial racial capitalist state, we need a Black-led movement that puts politics in command and names the perpetrators and collaborators that are culpable in the unfolding, late-stage capitalist disaster, and is capable of presenting a coherent vision of a socialist future in which all peoples rights to self-determination are recognized, and where the people provide for their communal security. Conditions of life will worsen as the contradictions of racial capitalism deepen. But the ever-consolidating cabal at the top will not give up power out of embarrassment or rocket en masse to Mars; they will have to be overthrown by a mass movement seeking social transformation. United States history dictates that Black folk must lead this movement. That means taking on an end-of-era, global responsibility.

Nobody is ready to take on this mission—but it’s got to be done, anyway.

—Black Agenda Report, February 4, 2021
https://www.blackagendareport.com/nightmare-years-will-repeat-themselves-until-people-kick-out-cabal

...the ever-consolidating cabal at the top will not give up power out of embarrassment or rocket en masse to Mars; they will have to be overthrown by a mass movement seeking social transformation...
Key Lessons of a Failed Insurrection

A socialist analysis

By Malik Miah and Barry Sheppard

The most important aspect of the January 6 march on the Capitol building, where both the House of Representatives and the Senate meet and where the Congress people have their offices, and the subsequent violent occupation of the building, was its open display of white supremacy.

It was organized and led by the white supremacist president of the United States, Donald Trump.

As more is revealed, those complicit in the failed insurrection include Republican Senators and House members, as well as members of the military and police. This includes the Army Lieutenant General Charles Flynn, the brother of Michael Flynn, a former National Security Adviser for Trump and jailed for federal charges, and pardoned by him.

One week later on January 13 the House voted to impeach Trump for inciting an insurrection. Ten Republicans voted with a majority of Democrats. This included the third ranking leader, Liz Cheney of Wyoming. Her father was Vice President under George W. Bush and a well-known hawk.

On January 20 Washington, D.C. was transformed into a wartime “Green Zone” with some 25,000-armed police and military units to protect the official event of the inauguration of Biden and Harris.

The January 6 insurrection did not succeed—barely. It is now clear that Trump sought to impose martial law, make himself president-for-life and stay in power. Because he did not succeed does not lessen its significance. The next attempt by a more competent demagogue could be effective.

January 6 should be seen in this context by progressives and the socialist left. Yet there are those on the left in the U.S. and internationally who deny that it was the final attempt by Trump and his supporters to carry out a coup through an insurrection.

Why an insurrection, not a riot

Mumia Abu-Jamal writing from prison correctly said it was an attack by one branch of the federal government against another branch.

Donald Trump, as the head of the Executive branch, launched an attack on the highest body of the Legislative branch, the U.S. Congress.

The aim of the violent invasion of the Capitol was to disperse Congress to prevent it from making the final count of the vote of the Electoral College. It succeeded in dispersing Congress for many hours.

The Pentagon, which was under the Commander in Chief, Trump, followed his orders to let it happen.

That meant January 6 was an insurrection—not a far-right riot without leadership.

It was an insurrection not against the Executive branch but by it. It wasn’t carried out by the military but by white supremacist civilians. These two facts led some on the left to be blinded to what had happened.

The occupation of the Capitol began during daylight. Many of the invaders led by white supremacist groups carried cell phones and other devices. They had weapons and knew where offices were located. They were one minute from where then Vice President Pence was hiding until a Black officer directed them away. They openly discussed murdering Pence, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and others.

Congress was not able to reconvene until 1:30 A.M. the following morning, and ratified that Biden was the president-elect. Ten Republican Senators and 139 House members voted to overturn the election, even after the insurrection. Their vote was an endorsement of Trump’s and the occupiers’ demand. They were part of the
insurrection, having fanned the flames of Trump’s assertions that the election was “stolen” from him.

While many Republican lawmakers came to accept that Biden would be the next president, almost all to this day refuse to admit that the election wasn’t stolen from Trump.

The purpose of dispersing Congress was to prevent that final approval of the election of Joe Biden as president and recognize that Trump had lost. It was the final attempt by Trump to overthrow the election—to carry out a coup d’etat.

Planning for coup began day after election

Trump announced right after the November 3 election that the election was stolen from him. He asserted he remained the legitimate president, something he has maintained up to the present day. That was a threat to carry out a coup, to overthrow the election of Biden, and keep himself in power.

He tried to do this first by legal means through lawsuits challenging the vote in various states with large Black and Latino populations. He expected that if this legal challenge reached the Supreme Court, the reactionary majority (three he appointed) would side with him and keep him president.

These legal efforts were attempts to overthrow the election. Whether the election was overturned legally or extra-legally by Trump that would have amounted to a coup d’état. Some on the left say no, that would not be a coup because it would not overthrow the government.

Of course, Trump didn’t attempt to overthrow his government, but he did attempt to overthrow preemptively the government in waiting headed by Biden. It was an attempt to overthrow that government.

If that had occurred there would have been mass actions against it in the streets, violence by police and then non-military troops such as the Border Patrol and other units Trump controlled, against the protests—in any case, major turmoil that the ruling class did not want.

The fact that he lost all these suits, including by the Supreme Court, indicates that a decisive section of the ruling class rejected a coup based on overturning what was widely seen as a legitimate election.

If the insurrectionists were African Americans seeking to end police violence and racism the military and police would have been mobilized and responded with deadly force. If Blacks and allies had entered the Capitol building, they would have been massacred

Trump, after his legal defeats, also considered replacing the acting Attorney General with a loyalist who would find a way to overturn the election.

When all these attempts failed and the Electoral College ratified the vote against him on December 14, Trump called on the Proud Boys (and by implication other white supremacist armed fascist groups) to come to Washington on January 6 to prevent Congress from accepting the Electoral College vote—his final attempt.

Part of the left denial that an insurrection had occurred, was initially down-playing of the violence. That extensive violence had occurred was obvious to anyone watching the insurrection that was broadcast live on TV.

For one thing, violent attacks on police and one death of an officer were swiftly reported, as was one death of an insurrectionist shot by law enforcement during the insurrection.

Another obvious indication of the violence was that Congress members of both houses were whisked away to safety from the screaming mob threatening to kill members of Congress.

Some of the insurrectionists were seen that afternoon with plastic ties used by police as handcuffs—they were preparing to kidnap some members of Congress.

According to the Washington Post:

“Three days before thousands of rioters converged on the U.S. Capitol, an internal Capitol Police intelligence report warned of a violent scenario in which ‘Congress itself’ could be the target of angry supporters of President Trump on January 6, laying out a stark alert that deepens questions about the security failures that day.

“In a 12-page report on January 3, the intelligence unit of the congressional police force described how thousands of enraged protesters, egged on by Trump and flanked by white supremacists and extreme militia groups, were likely to stream into Washington armed for battle.

“This time, the focus of their ire would be members of Congress, the report said.”

It continued:

“The report said organizers were urging Trump supporters to come armed with guns and to bring specialized combat gear—including gas masks and military-style bulletproof vests called ‘plate carriers’—to Washington on January 6.

“The memo concluded that January 6 was shaping up to potentially be a perfect storm of danger because of the size of the expected crowds, the urgency of the group’s mission, the call for demonstrators to bring lethal weapons, the location of the two largest protests in proximity to the Capitol grounds and the fact that both have been promoted by President Trump himself.
“The Stop the Steal protest in particular does not have a permit, but several high-profile speakers, including Members of Congress are expected to speak at the event…. This combined with Stop the Steal’s propensity to attract white supremacists, militia members and others who actively promote violence, may lead to a significantly dangerous situation for law enforcement and the general public alike.”

Yet nothing was done by the executive branch to stop them.

**Police and insurrectionists links**

Another thing missed by the *coup* deniers was the obvious collaboration by police seen fraternizing with the insurrectionists as well as the fact that the rioters had free rein of the Capitol for hours with no federal response.

The invaders did not fear arrest or resistance from the police. They knew the military would not intervene. It was the D.C. police who finally came in and escorted the rioters from the Capital without handcuffs or names taken.

The insurrection deniers downplayed or even ignored the display of white supremacy by the insurrectionists inside the Capital and outside among the tens-of-thousands of their supporters.

From the beginning of the gathering of the pro-Trump crowd in front of the White House, through the march on the Capitol initiated by Trump, to the mobilization in front of the Capitol and those within, the Boogaloo Boys, the Proud Boys, the “three-percenters” and other fascist white supremacists proudly displayed their flags and other insignias and were welcomed by the crowd and were part and parcel of it.

Inside the Capitol, these white supremacist groups were well-organized and cooperated, and led their followers to certain targets. Some insurrection deniers claimed the mob was disorganized and without leadership, indicating they didn’t pay attention to what was being televised.

By ignoring or downplaying the white supremacist character of the insurrectionists, the *coup* deniers miss the most important lesson of January 6. That was that open white supremacy is growing and has a big following among Trump’s supporters. These *coup* deniers run counter to what African American leaders are saying.

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**The far right and its ideology of racism and white supremacy must be smashed, and the only way to do that is by mass action.**

African American analysts and leaders have explained the obvious. If the insurrectionists were African Americans seeking to end police violence and racism the military and police would have been mobilized and responded with deadly force. If Blacks and allies had entered the Capitol building, they would have been massacred.

The history of the U.S. is one of racist legal and extralegal violence against peaceful Black demonstrators as was seen over the summer. The ideology of the ruling class is steeped in white supremacy.

Whites at the capital did not fear the police. They were there at the call from Trump and his supporters in Congress, the military and armed white militias.

These fascist groups were given cover by Trump, and they grew under his administration. They are likely to continue to grow, as they revel in their success in dispersing Congress, at least for ten hours or so, and causing a massive deployment of armed forces around Washington and the states’ Capitols for the January 20th inauguration of Biden.

**Pivot away from insurrection**

One of the *coup* deniers said that socialists should “pivot” away from what the insurrection revealed to concentrate on criticizing and mobilizing against Biden.

She ignored the white supremacist aspect of the political situation in the U.S. today, and raised only things like Biden’s opposition to Medicare for all, etc.

One key thing socialists must do is attack Biden’s proposal to “work with” the white supremacists and racists in Congress “to get things done.”

We also have to attack his support of mass incarceration of Black and Brown people and the fake “war on drugs” which is the basis of the new form of the systematic, institutionalized racism and national oppression of Blacks, the “New Jim Crow” as explained by Michelle Alexander.

No capitalist party politician raises opposition to the “war on drugs” and all its laws and how they were focused on Blacks and Latinos, as well as the Supreme Court’s justification for all this.

Of course, we will criticize and mobilize against all the other anti-working class, anti-Black, and imperialist actions Biden will do—he is after all the new head of the U.S. capitalist, imperialist state.

Some of the deniers of what happened on January 6 say that we are all done with Trump. “Trump is gone,” one said. It is an illusion to believe that the election of Biden dispensed with Trumpism.

Among other things that Trump represented was white supremacy and a Bonapartist drive toward autocracy. His hard supporters support both, and they have not gone away. In fact, they are enraged that Trump is not still president.

Different polls show that 70-80 percent of Republicans still believe the election was stolen from Trump. From that we can conclude that the same percentage of Trump voters, well over 50 million, are his hard supporters. They still represent the Republican base,
which is why most Republican politicians won’t say that there was not widespread fraud in the election of Biden.

In a video recording, one of Trump’s last comments while he was president, he said that the “movement we built” is here to stay. He added later that “I’ll be back in some form.”

No matter what happens to Trump as an individual, he will be part of the U.S. political scene one way or another in the period ahead.

One thing we must fight that Biden has proposed is new “domestic terrorism” laws. Ostensibly these would be against white supremacist violence. But they will not be worded that way, and will cast a wide net of possible “domestic terrorists.”

History has shown that all laws by capitalist governments that seem at first to be aimed at the right are more often used against the left, socialists and communists, Black movements, militant unionists, Muslims and so forth.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has warned against Biden’s proposed “domestic terrorism” laws.

“We cannot find our solutions in systems that ultimately harm us, particularly Black and Brown people,” said Manar Waheed, senior legislative and advocacy counsel at the ACLU.

She also said that “as a Muslim” she knew how these laws would be used.

We also should not think we’ve found an answer to white supremacism by allowing corporations like Twitter and Facebook to be the censor of what we write.

The far right and its ideology of racism and white supremacy must be smashed, and the only way to do that is by mass action.

Hell’s Kitchen rapper Marlon Craft’s “State of the Union” was written before the January 6 insurrection and released on January 19. The key lyrics are a call to act:

“And to defeat white supremacy, you gotta first want to defeat white supremacy
“I don’t think most of us really do
“How many white mirror convos [conversations] really bearing fruit?
“The only hope is that this moment in history
"Looks the same in both timelines of what the end could be
“Whether this the infection rising up and we fight and quell, or if it outscrapes us, and humanity just dies and fails
“It was always gon’ get worse ’fore it got better
“Racism was never gon’ go quietly to the night
“It never will but I do believe that it along with greed, can make its way out of our institutions so that all are free one day
“I ain’t say that it will, but today looks like today
“In both versions of the story
“So gon’ grab you a quill
“It depends what we do, there’s only one person the future starts and ends with
“It’s you”

1 The political movement in France that aimed to restore the French empire under the house of Napoleon Bonaparte who was Emperor of the French from 1804 until 1814, and again in 1815.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon
The attempted coup to overturn the election in the mass riots and invasion of the Capital Building to prevent Congress counting the Electoral College results, was prepared months in advance.

Before the November 3 election, Trump repeatedly whipped up his tens-of-millions of followers with the assertion that the only way he wouldn’t be re-elected was because of massive electoral fraud.

When he lost the election, he immediately refused to acknowledge his defeat, claiming that, indeed, such electoral fraud had occurred, and that he was in fact re-elected.

His tens-of-millions of followers believed him. Polls showed 70 percent of Republican voters believed him.

By so doing he was threatening to use his mass backing to stage a coup to stay in power. He launched some 60 lawsuits, backed by the Republican Party leadership, to get the courts to throw out the votes in key states, which would have made him the winner.

The Republicans lost every such lawsuit, because they were backed only by vague assertions without any facts.

Then the Electoral College met on December 14 and ratified that Trump had lost by 306 to 232 votes.

In preparation for the December 14 meeting, Trump urged his white nationalist armed supporters, the fascist Proud Boys among them, to come Washington.

Thousands rallied on the National Mall demanding the reversal of Biden’s victory. There was a counter protest which police attacked with pepper spray and clubs, and arrested 33. The white nationalists also managed to stab four.

The stabbing occurred just after members of the Proud Boys tore a “Black Lives Matter” banner from one of the oldest Black churches in Washington, and burned it in the street.

Trump singled out the Proud Boys by name and told them to “stand down” for the present but “stand ready” for further action.

It was only after the December 14 vote that some Republican leaders acknowledged that Biden, not Trump, had been elected. Trump immediately denounced them, including Senate Republican Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, formerly one of his staunchest puppets, and called on his supporters to come to Washington on January 6 to stop the Congressional vote.

“Big protest in DC on January 6. Be there! Be wild!” Trump shouted.

The proposed mass mobilization was backed by a two-thirds majority of Republicans in the House and some in the Senate, who said they would vote on January 6 to overturn the election, an attempted legal coup.

Tens-of-thousands of white nationalist supporters mobilized that morning near the White House. Trump addressed them. Part of what he said was:

“All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by a bold and radical left Democrats which is what they are doing and stolen by the fake news media. That is what they have done and what they are doing.

“We will never give up. We will never concede. It doesn’t happen. You don’t concede when there’s theft involved. Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore, and that is what this is all about.

“And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with, we will stop the steal!”

After a long harangue attacking “fake news,” Republicans who gave up on his coup attempt, etc. etc., he gave the order to his followers to march on the Capitol building and “be strong” because that was the only way “to take our country back.”
Earlier, his disgraced personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, told the crowd, “Let’s have a trial by combat!” at the Capitol, and Trump praised him.

“Stand up and fight!” Trump’s son Don Jr. shouted as he threatened Republicans meeting in the Congress unwilling to overturn the election: “We’re coming for you and we’re going to have a good time doing it!”

The crowd marched off to the Capitol Building. With the backing of the tens-of-thousands of supporters in front of the building, some hundreds, perhaps about 1,000, of thugs pushed on barricades of the Capitol police until the police let them invade the Capitol steps and some scaled up to where they could invade the Congressional rooms and offices.

The world watched on TV as many Congresspersons had to be evacuated to safety while others remained barricaded in their offices. Offices were ransacked, files stolen, furniture smashed. Trump flags were everywhere. One large Confederate flag was seen. A shirt read “Camp Auschwitz.”

One video showed the insurrectionists shouting at a cop to tell Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi that they were coming to get her. Others were threatening Vice President Mike Pence for not using his position of chair at the Congressional count of the vote, shouting “we want Pence!”

Some cops were seen high-fiving protesters, taking selfies with them, and pointing out where offices of certain Congresspersons were.

But there were attacks on other police, and an armed standoff at the door of the House. One policeman was killed by a member of the mob, and a policewoman shouting for help was almost crushed in a deliberate attack.

One Trump supporter was shot and killed by police as she attacked them.

But nothing was done for hours to remove the insurrectionists. The DC mayor tried to get the army to release the National Guard troops who were on standby but was refused on orders from Trump, according to some reports.

The world stood in amazement as the center of U.S. democracy, however decrepit it is, was occupied with nothing being done to stop them, for hours.

When the National Guard and Capitol Police were finally brought in, they rounded up those inside, and politely escorted them out, releasing them without a single arrest.

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...the U.S. capitalist class rules over the working class, by dividing white workers and Black workers (and other non-white workers as a consequence,) preventing working class unity without which there can be no working class challenge to capitalist rule...

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As insurrectionists stormed the U.S. Capitol, hundreds of fervent Trump supporters gathered for local rallies around the country. In Los Angeles a Trump mob attacked a Black woman near City Hall.

The young woman, Berlinda Nibo, was walking home when she came upon the rally and started documenting it on her phone. “Dozens quickly surrounded her, demanding to know who she voted for and to take off her face mask.

“She was then brutally attacked by the group of white supremacists, who shoved her, pulled out her hair extensions and pepper-sprayed her in the eyes. The bearded man pictured holding her from behind [documented on her phone] was one of several witnesses who intervened to help Nibo escape the out-of-control mob,” according to Democracy Now.

After the insurrectionists were removed from the Capitol, the Congress convened again. Even in the wake of the insurrection they helped foment with Trump, 139 Republican members of the House and ten in the Senate voted to overturn the election—voted for a coup, even if only symbolically as by then they were outvoted.

The contrast between how this attempted coup was treated by the cops, the Army and the National Guard and what we saw in all the many attacks on the Black Lives Matter protests was noted by many commentators, and certainly was not lost on African Americans.

One of these was interviewed on Democracy Now the next day, Bree Newsom, an artist and antiracist activist. Following the 2015 massacre of eight African American members of a Black church by a white nationalist in Charleston, South Carolina, Bree scaled the 30-foot flagpole at the state Capitol and tore down the Confederate flag, seen on national TV.

She said:

“One of the things we saw throughout the day yesterday [on social media] were people like myself, who have been present for various protests, mostly people of color, Black people, noting the obvious difference in terms of how police have a coordinated, overly militarized response to any kind of protest challenging racism in policing or racism in the government versus what we saw yesterday.

“And I think that is just another of these flashpoint moments in history that represents a culmination of everything that came before it, and it really shines a spotlight on everything that is fundamentally wrong. And one of those things is clearly policing.”
One could only imagine how if Black Lives Matter protesters stormed the Capital after over a month saying they would, would have been treated. They would have been met with thousands of troops, tanks, machine guns.

Concerning the congresspersons who continued to vote for the coup, Bree Newsom said:

“One of the things that was most striking to me yesterday—I was among the people who stayed into the wee hours of the morning watching how things played out at the Capital—was, you know, you would see congressperson after congressperson condemning the insurrectionist mob ...

“But there was still very little acknowledgement of the fact that the people who led the insurrection, the people who have incited these people to mob the Capitol, were sitting in the chamber, were still voicing their objection to the election.

“So, you know, this idea that we are somehow just going to reach across the aisle and shake hands and carry on as though we did not witness things play out as they did, as though the primary inciter of violence yesterday was not the president of the United States is just completely unrealistic. There’s no way that can happen.”

Ms. Newsom also made the key point:

“The central issue here is white supremacy. And white supremacy was foundational to the establishment of this nation. The main thing I continue to say as an activist, this is the central conflict.

“It is baked into our institutions. It was baked into our Constitution at the founding. And that continues to be the case. It is the defining internal conflict of the nation. People in the military. In the police. In the government. It was elected officials who initiated the events that led to this riot.”

To those so-called Marxists who never absorbed what Marx and Engels wrote about the English oppression of Ireland and of Irish workers, or what Lenin, Trotsky and the leaders in the first Leninist years of the Communist International wrote and said about national oppression, and who claim that the only central contradiction in American capitalism is that between the working class and the capitalists, we say Bree Newsom grasps reality better than you do, especially in this burning moment.

First Black slavery, and then the national oppression of Blacks beginning with the counter-revolution to the Civil War and Reconstruction soon after, up to the present, has been central to how the U.S. capitalist class rules over the working class, by dividing white workers and Black workers (and other non-white workers as a consequence,) preventing working class unity without which there can be no working class challenge to capitalist rule.

It was Lenin who first saw that Blacks are an oppressed nationality in the U.S. This became the position of the Communist International in its first years. It was Trotsky who brought this to the attention of the early Socialist Workers Party, together with C.L.R. James, which set it apart from the other socialists.

As W.E.B. DuBois wrote about Reconstruction and its overthrow, it is the “color line” that keeps the working class divided. He wrote that in 1934, when it was still true and remains true.

**Whither Trump?**

This sheds light on what’s in store for Trump and Trumpism. Trump was able to tap into white fear and hatred of African Americans, Latinos, Muslims and more, and to present himself as their strongman savior. “Make America Great Again” always meant “Make America White Again.”

White fear and hatred of Blacks reached a boiling point this year as the major wave of Black Lives Matter mobilizations against police murders of Blacks and systematic, institutionalized racism, burst on to the scene.

White racists could not stand to see thousands of Black people, joined by young whites, taking control of the streets, mobilizing against white racism. They strongly supported Trump’s leadership of the violent attacks on BLM by troops and police throughout the country.

Seventy-five million Americans voted for Trump, over 45 percent of those who voted. How many sympathize with Trump’s white supremacy? Sixty million? “Only” fifty million?

Trump succeeded in energizing these tens-of-millions and giving them legitimacy. He also mobilized them behind his stand that what is needed is a strong authoritarian state defending their perceived interests. While he didn’t succeed in imposing a coup to establish such a regime this time, the threat remains.

These tens-of-millions are not going away. They are not demoralized at all. They still remain the voting base of the Republican Party. The Republicans may split, either by Trump driving his enemies out, or vice versa. In either case, Trump remains the cult leader of this base, at least for the next period.

These tens-of-millions will continue to fight and will remain a factor in U.S. politics. The open fascists, like the Proud Boys, Boogaloo, and other such groups will grow. The broader movement around Trump will move further to the right, and quite possibly will become an incipient fascist group spearheading the ruling class intention of at least dispersing the Black upsurge.

The Democrats seek to accomplish cooption through using demagogic promises and pro-Black rhetoric devoid of meaningful action, under the cover of needing to make compromises with Republicans to “get things done.”

There will be no turning back to the pre-Trump situation. For the next period Trumpism is here to stay, even if it is a minority movement of “only” tens-of-millions.
The storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021 by an enraged far-right mob, one incited by Donald Trump, was a watershed moment in U.S. history. It was unprecedented and uniquely chilling. Perhaps most important, though, it dramatically underlined the need for workers and the oppressed to take it upon themselves to deal with the rising fascist threat—like, now.

The goal was to forcibly prevent an elected government from taking power; in other words, it was an attempted coup. It fell short, no thanks to the official guardians of our safety, but the marauders had tested their strength and sent out an unmissable invitation for others to join their cause. More evidence emerges every day about the coordinated planning that went into the assault. This reportedly included a tour of the Capitol for the benefit of the insurrectionists the day before, led by a congressional representative.

Certainly, not all of the tens-of-thousands of people who attended the pro-Trump rally early in the day were neo-Nazis. But key to the attack on the building were fascists like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, rabidly flaunting their racist, misogynist, anti-Semitic, heterosexual, xenophobic, and anti-Left agenda.

The day’s horrendous events did not come out of nowhere, and their cause goes much deeper than Trump’s four-year stint as Bigot-in-Chief. What Trump did in office was enable the rise of an already existing fascist current in the United States, which is at times subterranean and at times overt and visible. As we saw clearly on January 6, this current is represented not only in groups of street thugs but in institutions and agents of the state: cops, Congress, the military, local government.

In 1954, during the McCarthy era, founder of U.S. Trotskyism James P. Cannon wrote this:

“A fascist movement does not arise from the bad will of malicious demagogues.” Instead, he continued, it is the product of “the incurable crisis of capitalism,” which renders the ruling class “unable to maintain a stable rule through the old bourgeois democratic forms.” (See “Fascism and the Workers’ Movement.”)

In other words, capitalism carries the seeds of fascism within it; they sprout when the profit system is in dire trouble and people become desperate and willing to challenge the status quo.

So, what can be done? Educate, organize, and fight back.

As Cannon wrote in his 1954 essay:

“The beginnings of a fascist movement aiming to take power in this country, and fascism already in power, are not the same thing. Between the one and the other lies a protracted period of struggle in which the issue will be finally decided. Whoever recognizes that and ‘sounds the alarm,’ and thus helps to prepare the struggle of the workers, is doing what most needs to be done at the present time.”

Learning about fascism, its nature and its history, is a key first step. And this education is urgently needed in the union movement. Why? Because this is where the working class is most organized and potentially most strong, with the general strike as its most powerful weapon. And because, precisely due to the labor movement’s potential, its destruction is fascism’s ultimate goal.

Hand in hand with education must come building strong alliances and taking united action. It’s necessary to physically stand up against the neo-Nazis in order to combat the fear they engender while providing a hopeful, rational, humane alternative to their vicious, white-supremacist message. Rank-and-file unionists should demand that their leaders form self-defense guards to protect anyone and everyone targeted by the ultra-right.

Workers and oppressed people cannot rely for rescue on the powers-that-be, who will back fascism as the last resort to save the profit system. We need to create a multiracial, multi-issue, disciplined, anti-capitalist movement that includes Black Lives Matter activists, immigrants, fighters for reproductive justice, and more—everyone in jeopardy from the fascists and everyone already struggling for their rights. And we cannot afford to delay.

—FSP, February 2021
Fascist Trump supporters demanded that Trump be declared president again, even though he lost the popular vote. An all-white regiment of men armed to their teeth marched into DC and stormed Congress to stage an outright coup. The photos taken from the scene of the crime speak volumes. The aggressors meant business; they were carrying automatic guns, ropes and handcuffs to take hostages, and Dixie flags with “Trump is President” inscriptions. There are also photos of the police opening the gate and encircling the gunmen to protect them against arrests by other policemen!

Within a few hours of the siege on Congress, right-wing paramilitary gangs in other states such as Oregon and Kansas took it to the streets. There is no way that the FBI and other security agencies were oblivious to plans of violence by the fascists on a mass scale. They allowed it to happen, nonetheless. There is no question that Black Lives Matter protesters, leftists, workers, or people of color organizations would have been shot dead for much less havoc! Events in both DC and around the country point to a synchronized, tightly knit organization by the fascists, in tandem with the police.

None of this should be a surprise to anyone. The pandemic combined with Trump’s racist rhetoric and policies has untethered the vile racism that has existed in this country since its inception. The U.S. is based on both the genocide of the indigenous population and upon slavery. Capitalist politics has pit one ethnic group against the other for years, driving down the wages of all workers. U.S. imperialism has uprooted workers internationally, especially from Latin America, and forced them to migrate to the States. This has added fuel to the fire for these racist thugs. Trump speaks hatefully about the oppressed while his actions continue to widen racial divisions within the working class. These tensions can only result in racist violence. We should not have been surprised. In fact, many of us, especially revolutionaries, have predicted this for years.

...we need to form a labor party independent of capitalist politicians that will guide the working class to fight for their rights and the rights of all oppressed people...

For the last few months, the United Front Committee for a Labor Party (UFCLP) has warned against the violence unleashed both by the police and by the paramilitary gangs against protesters who demand justice for the victims of police terror. We called attention to the increasingly organized nature of the so-called “counter-protests” called for by white supremacists. We demanded that the Left and the organized working class form United Fronts and Public Safety Committees. When the Republicans seemed to be retreating in the face of the slim Democrat victory, we pointed out that this concession was a tactic to buy time and whip up support. Our warnings didn’t come out of the blue but from careful observation of Trump’s tactics and actions. Throughout the summer, Trump did everything in his power to put down the anti-racist popular revolt and steal the election. He deposed the Commander of the Armed Forces when the latter refused to deploy troops against the people in revolt. Trump’s threats to overturn the election and stay in power no matter what the results dictated were commonplace. Today, we are witnessing their culmination! This is not the ordinary racist “mob” that this country is unfortunately used to. This is an organized fascist attack.

The trade union leadership has been missing in action, allowing the capital-
ist politicians, both Democrat and Republican, to follow the lead of their bosses, permitting Trump to become leader of the “free” world. Trump did not just appear from thin air. The ground has been laid for him for more than four decades. By the 1970s working class people began to take a hit: outsourcing became the lynchpin of capitalist development, privatization of public services held sway, and many workers were barely able to hold on to their jobs. At the same time, the Southern Strategy was employed, pitting white working-class people against workers of color. The union leadership took no stand against the cuts. In fact, when air traffic controllers went on strike in 1981, the workers were left high and dry by the bureaucrats who refused to call for a general strike to support them. Capitulations like this eventually threw white workers into the clutches of a demagogue like Trump. Nonetheless, the trade union so-called leaders have been supporting Democrats who have time and again demonstrated that they are as anti-worker as the Republicans. We are still asked to put our faith in the police who are the same goons that shoot Black people daily. The chickens are now coming home to roost! This outburst was inevitable!

We shouldn’t harbor any illusions that the Democrats will come to our rescue, for they are unwilling to fight even for their democratically won election. Today’s events proved irrefutably that relying on the forces of “law and order” to uphold their own rules is a deadly mistake. In fact, the mayor of Portland has now said he is gunning for Antifa instead of the Proud Boys who created the crisis in Portland in the first place. Ted Wheeler, a Democrat, went on national TV to announce that he will no longer tolerate dissent and therefore will be going after Antifa. One can expect this kind of rhetoric more and more from public figures. We have seen this all before. Capitalism has already plunged the world into two world wars and countless others, killing untold millions. The capitalists and their politician servants are criminals against humanity.

This kind of carnage will continue if we let it, impacting people of color the worst. This country is in deep crisis because capitalism is gasping for breath in its death throes. Unless there is a working-class movement to cohere a coordinated challenge against this capitalist assault, repression against people who are fighting for their legitimate rights will go on. The police will come down harder on people of color for any perceived transgressions.

We need to build a political party based on working class self-activity, and eventually, we need a society that is built and controlled by workers. The only way we will survive the devastation of wars foisted on working class people globally is to change society from one based on profits to one based on human cooperation. That means building a socialist society. As a first step, we need to form a labor party independent of capitalist politicians that will guide the working class to fight for their rights and the rights of all oppressed people.

This incident at the Capitol will be the first of many. We have to decide as workers how to stand tall and firm against fascists to defend and expand our democratic conquests, and how we can eventually rid the world of capitalism.

Forward for Workers’ United Front against Fascism! Forward for a Workers’ Party! Down with the Fascists! General Strike to defend and expand our democratic conquests!

—United Front Committee for Labor Party, UFCLP, January 6, 2021


THE INSANITY DEFENSE
The Electoral College Must Go

By Kevin Cooper

Death Row, San Quentin State Prison—Ain’t it a bitch! It was stunning to see such a sorry spectacle at the Capitol. We can’t be too surprised, though, to see how differently violent white rioters are treated by law enforcement (one cop even wore a MAGA hat!) than peaceful Black protesters have been, historically and even recently. The drama does at least provide an opportunity to force examination of another remnant of racist history that should expire: The Electoral College.

I know that times have changed. The late Congressman John Lewis stated as much while he was still alive and fighting to make sure that blights on this country like voter suppression, police brutality and overall racism did not regress to what they were when he was growing up in the South.

And, yes, I do understand that some things have gotten better over time. For example, there is now a moratorium on the death penalty in the state of California, marijuana is legal in many states and gay and lesbian couples have the right to marry. There are now more women, people of color, gays, lesbians and transgender people serving in public office. The U.S. House of Representatives is more diverse than it has ever been in the history of this country, and the traditionally Republican states of Georgia and Arizona just helped elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as president and vice president, and Georgia will be represented by two Democrats in the Senate—one of who is first African-American to represent Georgia in that role and only the 11th Black senator in 244 years of U.S. politics.

However, when it comes to certain aspects of politics, change doesn’t seem to be happening as much or as fast, if at all. This is especially true when it comes to the historical slave-era anachronism called the Electoral College. Voter disenfranchisement and suppression, racism, false claims of illegal ballots and illegal votes being cast and cheating in various forms are plainly evident in the political area in this divided country. Why? Because all these have to do with political power, which political party runs and controls every aspect of life in this country, from politically appointed judges, to the very purse strings that financially support everything from education and infrastructure to relief from this once-a-century pandemic.

The only reason certain changes have happened is because of the grassroots efforts of everyday people. They made this country change through their hard work, their organizing, their marches and protests and not taking “no” for an answer. Many did that and were beaten, and in some cases murdered, by either the powers that be or their supporters for doing what the late John Lewis did: getting into “good trouble.”

Now it’s time for this new generation of people, as well as people from previous generations, to join together to make the still needed changes in this country that include passing the Equal Rights Amendment and ending the Electoral College. Here in 2021, with this country’s ever-growing diverse population, there is no longer a need for the Electoral College, created in the 18th century and amended in the 19th. While certain people want it to stay in effect so they can win the presidency without winning the majority vote of the people, this country doesn’t need it and would be better off without it.

While it will not be easy to eliminate, this country must start to think about it seriously if they want to avoid the continued decline in credibility of our democracy. How damaging is it to that faith when a presidential candi-
date leads by millions of total votes, as Hillary Clinton did against Donald Trump in 2016, and yet does not receive the majority of Electoral College votes? We should move to direct popular vote system of presidential election.

**Some votes more valuable than others**

This distortion of the alleged intent of the system can happen because every state’s Electoral College vote total is based not on the number of people who vote, but rather on the overall population of the state (represented approximately by the number of House of Representatives seats they have) plus two (the number of senators). Since there are a number of very low-population states, what could be a marginal boost (the bonus two) ends up being huge statistically for states like Wyoming, where a vote is worth three times that of a California voter. Further disrupting the equality for voters is that if your state has high voter turnout compared to its population, the weight of each vote is further shrunken—Colorado (5.7 million) and South Carolina (5.1 million) have roughly the same population yet a Coloradan’s vote is worth three times that of a California voter. Further, the swing states change over time—welcome Arizona and Georgia—three-quarters of Americans live in states almost completely ignored by presidential candidates.

Keeping the Electoral College is like staying in yesteryear, relying on an outdated artifact maintained through inertia and the help of certain people and organizations that want to take us backward and not forward in this country. Sure, it has been the law for a long time, but laws can be changed, even the Constitution—just as has been done with formerly accepted aspects of life that were to the detriment of certain citizens of this country, most notably chattel slavery, denying women the right to vote, and child labor, to give a few examples. Any law can be changed, even the Electoral College, even if it will not be easy to do. But ending chattel slavery wasn’t easy, nor getting women the right to vote, or gaining any other rights worth having that were denied to the oppressed.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to address racial discrimination that, 48 years later, was no longer much of a problem! In other words, “times have changed.” They determined that the country “has changed,” that “[r]egardless of how to look at the record, no one can fairly say that it shows anything approaching the ‘pervasive,’ ‘flagrant,’ ‘widespread,’ and ‘rampant’ discrimination that faced Congress in 1965.”

Just last month, voter advocates in Georgia filed a lawsuit charging that 198,000 voters—young, people of color and low-income—were removed from the voting rolls in 2019, again falsely claiming they had all moved.

The five conservative justices who derailed the 1965 Voting Rights Act said it had been passed to address racial discrimination that, 48 years later, was no longer much of a problem! In other words, “times have changed.” They determined that the country “has changed,” that “[r]egardless of how to look at the record, no one can fairly say that it shows anything approaching the ‘pervasive,’ ‘flagrant,’ ‘widespread,’ and ‘rampant’ discrimination that faced Congress in 1965.”

In what universe? Ask the 340,134 voters in Georgia in 2018, many of them Black, who had been purged from the voting rolls for having allegedly moved, when they were still living at the same address as where they were registered, making them unable to vote in the 2018 election. Who purged them? Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, a white Republican running for governor in that same election against Stacey Abrams, a popular Black leader in the state legislature. He won by 54,700
votes. Was that not “rampant discrimination?” Just last month, voter advocates in Georgia filed a lawsuit charging that 198,000 voters—young, people of color and low-income—were removed from the voting rolls in 2019, again falsely claiming they had all moved.

If certain people and organizations can’t find one way to keep Black people from voting, then they find another way to do it. Closing down polling places in Black neighborhoods, imposing voter ID laws, and gerrymandering—redrawing district lines to favor candidates of a particular party—are being used to this day to stop Black people from voting or reducing the power of their vote because certain white people fear that if enough Black people cast their vote, white people will lose privilege and power. This country cannot have it both ways, that on one hand, that it is no longer much of a problem, and on the other hand allow the racism that elevates white people to still be used!

The Supreme Court excused gutting the 1965 Voting Rights Act by saying times have changed for the better, but their ruling now allows those same Southern and ex-slave states that historically disenfranchised Black people to continue to do so. Times have changed, but history is repeating itself. For example, in 2000 in the state of Florida, during the Bush-Gore presidential campaign, Black people who had voted had untold numbers of their votes destroyed, and many other Black voters were barred from voting for various reasons. This also helped hand the presidency to Bush—that and hanging chads.

It is worth noting that Chief Justice John Roberts, who wrote the majority opinion in 2013 eviscerating the Voting Rights Act, had worked on Bush’s legal team in Florida in 2000, as did Trump-appointed Supreme Court justices Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett. That’s when the high court intervened and stopped the ballot recount in that state when Bush was ahead by only 537 votes. Although Gore got 550,000 more popular votes nationally, the 25 Electoral College votes from Florida handed the election, and presidency, to Bush. Where does democracy fit into this picture? It doesn’t.

All of this voter suppression in these divided states of America is an ongoing stain on our history. This historical racism dates back to the creation of the Electoral College, and it hasn’t stopped. It is just like a chameleon, the small lizard whose skin changes colors, this is how racist and political opponents operate and change their tactics of voter suppression, even using felony convictions or arrest records or court fines to disenfranchise people.

Ongoing racism

If it’s true what the Supreme Court ruled in 2013 concerning the 1965 Voting Rights Act, that racial discrimination is no longer much of a problem, that “times have changed,” then the same has to be true about the Electoral College, which came into being in the 18th century. It was born when the Founding Fathers were writing the Constitution and were torn between having the president chosen by popular vote or members of Congress. One reason they hesitated about the popular votes was that they believed citizens of the states would not be able to learn enough about the candidates to vote intelligently.

They finally compromised on a system of electors chosen by the states after a divisive debate over how to count the population to see how many electors each state would have. The Northern “free” states had larger populations than Southern slave states, in part because slaves were considered property, not human beings, and therefore could not be counted in the population. The slave states were crying out that the North would win every presidential election due to the imbalance of the voter population, so in order to appease the South, those states were allowed to count each slave as three-fifths of a person to take away the population advantage of the north.

The southerners did not want to count a slave as a whole human being because if they did, it would go against their historical lies that slaves weren’t fully human beings, and that they as slave owners were not in fact enslaving human beings. If they said in any way, shape or form that enlaveling Africans and Black Americans were in fact whole human beings, this would undercut their long-held argument and belief that they weren’t, so they settled for the bizarre partial-person compromise.

The Electoral College today has 538 electors, totaling the number of senators and representatives from each state. Then, as now, it is only to choose the president. Nobody in Congress is chosen by the Electoral College. No other electoral contest in the United States is determined by any “electors” other than the citizens who vote in regular elections, and the candidate who gets the most votes wins. That is democracy.

Democrats have won the popular vote five out of the last eight presidential elections and twice were denied the office due to fewer electoral votes despite more popular votes. Maybe that is why more Republicans want to keep the Electoral College than anyone else. Fully 58 percent of Americans in March 2020 wanted to amend the Constitution to get rid of the Electoral College; 81 percent of Democrats/leaning Democrat want the voters to choose the president; only 32 percent of Republicans/leaning Republican want that.

This makes no sense, especially since times have changed, and African Americans are no longer considered three-fifths of a human being…well at least by most people we aren’t.

A remnant of a bygone era

Here in 2020 and beyond, there is no way to honestly think about the Electoral College logically as preserving or advancing democracy. It only makes
sense to think of it historically as a remnant of a bygone era when Black people were determined to be three-fifths of a human being, and the excuse that Americans cannot learn enough about the candidates has been buried by the massive saturation of print, broadcast, internet and social media that exists.

Democracy is about one person one vote. That is what the popular vote is. The Electoral College is not about one person one vote. It is in fact the only way that the loser of the popular vote who was not chosen by the majority of the American voters, can win the presidential election. One person, one vote is democracy plain and simple. The Electoral College must go. It’s a relic, a thing of the past, it does not belong in a real democracy. If the Voting Rights Act is no longer needed, then the Electoral College is most definitely no longer needed.

If it’s true that in the presidential election of 1800-01 that Thomas Jefferson metaphorically rode into the White House on the backs of slaves with the Electoral College vote, then here in 2020 and in the future, whoever rides into the White House must metaphorically do so on the shoulders of the majority of the American voters, the free people who make the popular vote.

There is no more going back, no more of the same old same old. It’s a new day, a new time, the future is ahead of us, and we can no longer afford as a free country to retain practices from the past that were not made to help all of us but created to help a certain few in order to oppress others. The Constitution is a living document, just as we are living people. We must stop using and misusing old laws from yesteryear in today’s and tomorrow’s world.

I know that hypocrisy runs rampant in this country, so it’s going to take all of us who honestly believe in one person one vote and real democracy to make all the people in power in this country start to make this country what those so-called Founding Fathers said it could be when they put pen to paper and wrote it down.

—Sheerpost, January 19, 2021

https://sheerpost.com/2021/01/19/the-electoral-college-must-go/

Kevin Cooper is an innocent man on San Quentin’s Death Row in California. He continues to struggle for exoneration and to abolish the death penalty in the whole U.S. Learn more about his case at: www.kevincooper.org
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The Pardoning of Blackwater Killers
By Richard Becker

Along with a motley collection of wealthy swindlers and fraudsters, President Donald Trump on December 22 at the end of his term pardoned four former Blackwater private contractors (mercenaries) convicted in the infamous September 16, 2007, Nisour Square massacre in Baghdad.

Seventeen Iraqis were killed and 14 seriously wounded in an unprovoked attack by the four, who indiscriminately fired machine guns, sniper rifles, and rocket-propelled grenades into a crowd of unarmed civilians. Among the dead were two boys, nine and 11-years-of-age, and a woman burned alive in her car. The four killers suffered no injuries, and their claims of self-defense were rejected by Iraqi and U.S. investigations. It was one of many atrocities committed by U.S. and allied forces.

Trials and retrials in the U.S. found the four guilty of heinous crimes including first-degree murder and manslaughter.

But why were they never tried in Iraq, site of their monstrous actions? Answering that question unmasks the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Iraq that began with the 2003 “Shock and Awe” invasion.

Now the four will walk free, as do the much higher-ranking war criminals who planned and executed the war against Iraq, a country half-way around the world that did not and could not threaten the United States. Iraq remains decimated, while George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, who perpetrated the war and occupation that followed, have never had to face justice. Nor have such fervent supporters of the war like Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.

The reaction in Iraq to news of the pardons was widespread outrage, from Iraqi government officials to people on the street, and renewed demands that the U.S. finally get out.

Reaction in Iraq

A well-known Iraqi commentator, Muhammad Waeli, tweeted: “Pardoning the Blackwater killers is renewing the crime committed against the Iraqi people.”

Fares Saadi, an official who led the Iraqi investigation leading to the convictions of the Blackwater, told the AFP news agency, “I knew we’d never get justice.”

“The infamous Blackwater company killed Iraqi citizens at Nisour Square. Today we heard they were released upon personal order by President Trump, as if they don’t care for the spilled Iraqi blood,” said Saleh Abed, a Baghdad resident, interviewed by Al-Jazeera.

Blackwater was notorious for its extreme racist brutality against the Iraqi population. Founded by Erik Prince, billionaire brother of Trump’s
Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and a frequent visitor to the Trump White House. Blackwater, which had thousands of high-paid mercenaries supporting 150,000 U.S. troops in Iraq from 2003-11, were hated and feared by the population.

“We used to be terrified of them, especially Blackwater, who were the nastiest of them all,” said Ribal Mansour, a witness to the massacre.

Dr. Haidar al-Barzanji, an Iraqi researcher and academic, told the Guardian: “Trump has no right to decide on behalf of victims’ families to pardon these criminals. It is at odds with human rights and against the law. In Iraqi law they can only be pardoned if the families of victims pardon them.”

If the Nisour Square killers had been tried in an Iraqi court, there can be little doubt that they would be in prison today. But neither they nor any other occupation personnel were subject to Iraqi law.

Colonial injustice protected Blackwater guards from trial in Iraq

After conquering Iraq in April 2003, Washington dismantled the Iraqi state and government, and set up a new colonial-style dictatorship answerable only to the Pentagon. The “Coalition Provisional Authority” was headed by an American bureaucrat, J. Paul Bremer.

In June 2003, Bremer issued CPA Order 17, which stated: “Multinational forces, international consultants, and U.S. personnel are immune from the Iraqi legal process. … Coalition contractors and their sub-contractors as well as their employees not normally resident in Iraq, shall not be subject to Iraqi laws. … ”

Order 17 remained in place until 2008. What replaced it differed very little in substance. In the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), Iraq was granted jurisdiction over U.S. military and civilian forces only for the commission of “grave premeditated felonies” and only when the personnel are off-duty. What the definition of “grave premeditated felonies” meant was left to a “Joint U.S-Iraqi Commission.”

In 2011, the Obama administration withdrew U.S. troops from Iraq after a new agreement to grant U.S. forces continued extraterritorial immunity. U.S. forces returned in 2014 when much of Iraq and Syria was conquered by ISIS.

While tens-of-thousands of Iraqis were arrested, imprisoned and abused by the occupying forces, the search for records of U.S. personnel locked up in Iraqi jails yields nothing.

CPA Order 17 and the 2008 SOFA embodied the old colonial policy of “extraterritoriality,” the racist doctrine that holds the colonizers cannot be judged by the colonized. It means that the occupiers can murder, rape and steal with impunity.

Extraterritoriality and colonialism

When China was divided into “spheres of influence” by several imperialist powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, violent acts by soldiers and civilians against Chinese nationals and the fact that the perpetrators were immune from prosecution in Chinese courts led to many acts of resistance.

In 1906, Washington established a special U.S. Court for China based in Shanghai, with jurisdiction over all U.S. citizens in its district, which was all of China. It was only disbanded in 1943 in the midst of World War II when the U.S. and China were allies.

And it was not just China. Wherever colonialism has existed so have racist parallel systems of justice/injustice.

What it means to live under colonial rule was expressed by the classmate of a medical student killed in Nisour Square. She spoke anonymously to the Guardian, fearing retaliation:

“The Americans have never approached us Iraqis as equals. As far as they are concerned, our blood is cheaper than water and our demands for justice and accountability are merely a nuisance.”

—Liberation News, December 27, 2020

Richest 500 Add $1.8 Trillion to Their Wealth in 2020

By Julia Conley

Bloomberg’s year-end report on the wealth of the world’s billionaires shows that the richest 500 out of the 2,095 billionaires on the planet added $1.8 trillion to their combined wealth in 2020, together accumulating a total net worth of $8 trillion.

The Bloomberg Billionaires Index recorded its largest annual gain in the list’s history last year, with a 31 percent increase in the wealth of the richest people.

The historic hoarding of wealth came as the world confronted the coronavirus pandemic and its corresponding economic crisis, which the United Nations last month warned is a “tipping point” set to send more than 207 million additional people into extreme poverty in the next decade—bringing the number of people living in extreme poverty to one billion by 2030.

Even in the richest country in the world, the United States, the rapidly widening gap between the richest and poorest people grew especially stark in 2020.

As Dan Price, an entrepreneur and advocate for fair wages, tweeted, the 500 richest people in the world amassed as much wealth in 2020 as “the poorest 165 million Americans have earned in their entire lives.”

The top ten richest people in the world own more than $1.12 trillion. Meanwhile, with more than half of U.S. adults living in households that lost income due to the pandemic, nearly 26 million Americans reported having insufficient food and other groceries in November—contributing to a rise in shoplifting of essential goods including diapers and baby formula. About 12 million renters were expected to owe nearly $6,000 each in back rent after the new year.

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Tesla CEO Elon Musk enjoyed an historic growth in wealth last year, becoming the second richest person in the world and knocking Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates down to third place. Musk’s total net worth grew by $142 billion in 2020, to $170 billion—the fastest creation of personal wealth in history, according to Bloomberg.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos is at the top of the list, with a net worth of $190 billion. Bezos added more than $75 billion to his wealth in 2020, as the public grew dependent on online shopping due to Covid-19 restrictions and concern for public health.

While Bezos and a select few others in the U.S. have amassed historic gains in personal wealth in the last year, the federal government has yet to extend much in the way of meaningful assistance to struggling Americans. The Republican-led Senate before the inauguration continued to stonewall a vote on legislation that would send $2,000 checks to many American households.

Then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) denounced the proposal as “socialism for rich people” even though the plan includes a phase-out structure and individuals making only up to $115,000 per year—not those in the highest tax brackets—would receive checks.

“Surging billionaire wealth hits a painful nerve for the millions of people who have lost loved ones and experienced declines in their health, wealth, and livelihoods,” Chuck Collins, director of the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies, told Bloomberg this week. “Worse, it undermines any sense that we are ‘in this together’—the solidarity required to weather the difficult months ahead.”

—Common Dreams, January 3, 2021


SpaceX owner and Tesla CEO Elon Musk poses on the red carpet of the Axel Springer Award 2020, in Berlin, Germany.
The Law and Order President led his followers, carrying the traitorous Confederate flag, to violate law and order in an attempted coup. Some of the treasonous window smashers wore T-shirts with the slogan—Camp Auschwitz and 6 MWNE (six million Jews was not enough.) The Jews were exterminated by the Nazis, as were 75 million people who died in World War Two defeating the Nazi Fascists.

It is obvious that a conspiracy to allow this insurrection designed to terrorize Congress and the people was a criminal conspiracy organized within the White House, FBI, military, National Guard and the Republican Party. The Nazi Big Lie has been used by Trump for years, aided and abetted by the treasonous, racist Republican Party and their corporate backers on Wall Street. The Big Lie was developed and promoted by the German Nazi Party. Tell a lie, the bigger it is the more you tell it: The election was rigged and stolen, COVID-19 is a hoax—immigrants, and Muslims and other scapegoats are to blame for everything that goes wrong.

Did working people across the nation starve and shrink the Public Health Service for decades allowing COVID-19 to sweep across the land?

Under the CARES Act, the U.S. government gave trillions of dollars to bail out Wall Street and financial institutions while only pennies went to working people. The recent relief bill includes another “200 billion give away to the rich….”

The top one percent now owns 50 percent of the Stock Market. Today, some 30 percent of Corporate America is not earning enough to pay the interest on their debts and are called Zombie corporations. These Zombie companies are now $2 Trillion in debt.

The Fed is still pumping $120 billion every month into the financial markets buying up debt while 40 million workers are unemployed or underemployed and drowning in debt. States and cities across the country have already seen layoffs of over one million workers.

Did Muslims deregulate corporations and allow them to poison workers on the job and in their homes?

Did immigrants move industry overseas, taking jobs from U.S. workers and causing iPhones to be made all over Asia? Did they force Harley Davidson to build motorcycles in Brazil, India, and Thailand? Did they force Donald Trump to make his neckties in China?

Did desperate asylum seekers pass laws to weaken labor unions while giving billions to the military?

While COVID-19 testing rates fall and COVID-19 infections explode across the nation, the criminal homicidal policy of forcing people back to work and school continues to guarantee massive infections, sickness, and death, now at more than one-half-a-million Americans. Death is falling most heavily on the elderly, the working class, and people of color.

Part of the present tragedy is that millions of workers have been filled with fear and hatred, misled by poisonous racist, nationalist and religious fanaticism. Their solidarity and labor unions have shrunken, their leaders have betrayed them, and working-class history has been suppressed and forgotten. Too many no longer know that they are members of a worldwide working class; they no longer know what side of the fence they are on. Yet all is not lost—political consciousness is ever-changing.
From its beginning, America has been built on worker exploitation and racism. Only working people acting in their own interest can demand that racist terrorists are outlawed, and the coup plotters are investigated, tried, and punished. Only an independent movement of the working class can defend us against the growing neo-Nazi racist movement and the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The urgent task for the multiracial working class is to rebuild solidarity and class consciousness; to reclaim the power of the general strike and mass mobilizations and demand social transformation from a profit-driven society to one powered by the health and needs of the 99 percent. A movement for egalitarianism: no rich or poor, no hierarchy of “race,” tribe, religion or nation. We can build a society of economic, social, and political equality for all.

Conspiracy theory: an attempt to explain harmful or tragic events as the result of the actions of a small powerful group.1

Three Examples:

2. The conspiracy of executives at VW (Volkswagen) and Fiat-Chrysler fraudulently sold millions of polluting cars all over the world from 2008-2015.
3. The 2020 COVID-19 conspiracy of silence and death—the President, his cabinet, the intelligence agencies, and Congress lied to the nation while they kept the truth secret from 330 million U.S. citizens.

Banker’s conspiracy robs the planet

The major U.S. and international bank executives and bank regulators rigged the London interbank offered rate (Libor) to increase their profits. An estimated $800 trillion in financial products are linked to the Libor rate including mortgages, student loans and credit cards. Manipulating the rate upwards robbed millions of people of billions-of-dollars in inflated loan cost over the years. The American banker “Mr. Birkenfeld, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the United States and was sentenced to 40 months in prison.”2

COVID-19 conspiracy of silence and death

On November 20, 2019, the U.S. Select Committee on Intelligence, the National Security Council and the White House were informed about the potential for a possible new pandemic. This information was kept secret from the American people.

January 24, 2020, the Senate Health Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee held a closed-door briefing on the COVID-19 outbreak. The subjects of the meeting were kept secret.

Automakers conspiracy poisons the planet

Volkswagen and Fiat Chrysler CEOs, executives and engineers, found that making less polluting diesel engines was difficult and expensive so they conspired to install software to falsify emission results. Between 2009 and 2015, 11-million-cars worldwide had computers that gave a fraudulent reading on emissions control testing, allowing ten to 40-times-more smog-causing nitrogen oxides to be emitted—poisoning people’s lungs around the world.

“A Volkswagen engineer was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge Sean F. Cox of the Eastern District of Michigan to 40-months in federal prison, and two years of supervised release, for his role in a nearly ten-year conspiracy to defraud U.S. regulators.”3

3 Photo: Bonnie Weinstein
According to the Washington Post, March 20, 2020, “U.S. intelligence agencies were issuing ominous, classified warnings in January and February about the global danger posed by the coronavirus while President Trump and lawmakers played down the threat and failed to take action that might have slowed the spread.”

On February 7, 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping talked by phone with Trump about the dangerous new virus.

Between January 29 and February 29, 2020, the New York Times did not write a single editorial about the developing pandemic.

On February 28, 2020, Trump accused the Democrats of politicizing the deadly coronavirus as “their new hoax”.

The tapes published by author Bob Woodward, clearly reveal that President Trump admits to lying to the public about the dangers of COVID-19.

This was a conspiracy at the highest levels of government to keep silent about the threat posed by the virus which has claimed over one-half-million American lives.

Eliminating conspiracies requires social transformation designed to prevent the emergence of any “small powerful group.” A society of equals, no rich or poor, no powerful or weak, no exploiters or exploited, no social hierarchy—a militantly egalitarian society of social, economic, and political equality for all.

—January 6, 2021

Globally, there is an ongoing trend of a handful of big companies determining what food is grown, how it is grown, what is in it and who sells it. This model involves highly processed food adulterated with chemical inputs ending up in large near-monopoly supermarket chains or fast-food outlets that rely on industrial-scale farming.

While the brands lining the shelves of giant retail outlets seem vast, a handful of food companies own these brands which in turn rely on a relatively narrow range of produce for ingredients. At the same time, this illusion of choice often comes at the expense of food security in poorer countries that were compelled to restructure their agriculture to facilitate agro-exports courtesy of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and global agribusiness interests.

In Mexico, transnational food retail and processing companies have taken over food distribution channels, replacing local foods with cheap processed items, often with the direct support of the government. Free trade and investment agreements have been critical to this process and the consequences for public health have been catastrophic.

Mexico’s National Institute for Public Health released the results of a national survey of food security and nutrition in 2012. Between 1988 and 2012, the proportion of overweight women between the ages of 20 and 49 increased from 25 to 35 percent and the number of obese women in this age group increased from nine to 37 percent. Some 29 percent of Mexican children between the ages of five and 11 were found to be overweight, as were 35 percent of the youngsters between 11 and 19, while one-in-ten school age children experienced anemia.

Former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, concludes that trade policies had favored a greater reliance on heavily processed and refined foods with a long shelf life rather than on the con-

Farmers’ Protest in India
Price of failure will be immense
BY COLIN TODHUNTER

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Former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, concludes that trade policies had favored a greater reliance on heavily processed and refined foods with a long shelf life rather than on the con-

Photograph Source: Felton Davis – CC BY 2.0
amenable to fresh and more perishable foods, particularly fruit and vegetables. He added that the overweight and obesity emergency that Mexico faces could have been avoided.

In 2015, the non-profit organization GRAIN reported that the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) led to the direct investment in food processing and a change in Mexico’s retail structure (towards supermarkets and convenience stores) as well as the emergence of global agribusiness and transnational food companies in the country.

NAFTA eliminated rules preventing foreign investors from owning more than 49 percent of a company. It also prohibited minimum amounts of domestic content in production and increased rights for foreign investors to retain profits and returns from initial investments. By 1999, U.S. companies had invested 5.3 billion dollars in Mexico’s food processing industry, a 25-fold increase in just 12 years.

U.S. food corporations began to colonize the dominant food distribution networks of small-scale vendors, known as tiendas (corner shops). This helped spread nutritionally poor food as they allowed these corporations to sell and promote their foods to poorer populations in small towns and communities. By 2012, retail chains had displaced tiendas as Mexico’s main source of food sales.

In Mexico, the loss of food sovereignty induced catastrophic changes to the nation’s diet and many small-scale farmers lost their livelihoods, which was accelerated by the dumping of surplus commodities (produced at below the cost of production due to subsidies) from the U.S. NAFTA rapidly drove millions of Mexican farmers, ranchers and small businesspeople into bankruptcy, leading to the flight of millions of immigrant workers.

**Warning for India**

What happened in Mexico should serve as a warning to Indian farmers who continue their protest against three recent farm bills that are designed to fully corporatize the agrifood sector through contract farming, the massive roll-back of public sector support systems, a reliance on imports (boosted by a future U.S. trade deal) and the acceleration of large-scale (online) retail.

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**The plan to radically restructure agrifood in the country is being sold to the public under the guise of “modernizing” the sector. And this is to be carried out by self-proclaimed “wealth creators” like Zuckerberg, Bezos and Ambani who are highly experienced at creating wealth—for themselves.**

If you want to know the eventual fate of India’s local markets and small retailers, look no further than what U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in 2019. He stated that Amazon had “destroyed the retail industry across the United States.”

And if you want to know the eventual fate of India’s farmers, look no further than the 1990s when the IMF and World Bank advised India to shift hundreds-of-millions out of agriculture in return for up to more than $120 billion in loans at the time.

India was directed to dismantle its state-owned seed supply system, reduce subsidies, run down public agriculture institutions and offer incentives for the growing of cash crops for export to earn foreign exchange. Part of the strategy would also involve changing land laws so that land could be sold and amalgamated for industrial-scale farming.

The plan was for foreign corporations to capture the sector, with the aforementioned policies having effectively weakened or displaced independent cultivators.

To date, this process has been slow, but the recent legislation could finally deliver a knock-out blow to tens-of-millions of farmers and give what the likes of Amazon, Walmart, Facebook, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midlands, Louis Dreyfus, Bunge and the global agritech, seed and agrochemical corporations have wanted all along. It will also serve the retail/agribusiness/logistics interests of India’s richest man, Mukesh Ambani, and its sixth richest, Gautam Adani.

During their ongoing protests, farmers have been teargassed, smeared and beaten. Journalist Satya Sagar notes that government advisors fear that seeming to appear weak with the agitating farmers would not sit well with foreign agrifood investors and could stop the flow of big money into the sector—and the economy as a whole.

And it is indeed “big” money. Facebook invested 5.5 billion dollars last year in Mukesh Ambani’s Jio Platforms (e-commerce retail). Google has also invested 4.5 billion dollars. Currently, Amazon and Flipkart (Walmart has an 81 percent stake) together control over 60 percent of the country’s overall e-commerce market. These and other international investors have a great deal to lose if the recent farm legislation is repealed. So does the Indian government.

Since the 1990s, when India opened up to neoliberal economics, the country has become increasingly dependent on inflows of foreign capital. Policies are being governed by the drive to attract and retain foreign investment and maintain “market confidence” by ceding to the demands of international capital. “Foreign direct investment” has thus become the holy grail of the Modi-led administration.

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34 SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT Vol. 21, No. 2
Little wonder the government needs to be seen as acting “tough” on protesting farmers because now, more than ever, attracting and retaining foreign reserves will be required to purchase food on the international market once India surrenders responsibility for its food policy to private players by eliminating its buffer stocks.

The plan to radically restructure agrifood in the country is being sold to the public under the guise of “modernizing” the sector. And this is to be carried out by self-proclaimed “wealth creators” like Zuckerberg, Bezos and Ambani who are highly experienced at creating wealth—for themselves.

According to the recent Oxfam report “The Inequality Virus,” Mukesh Ambani doubled his wealth between March and October 2020. The coronavirus-related lockdown in India resulted in the country’s billionaires increasing their wealth by around 35 percent, while 170,000 people lost their jobs every hour in April 2020 alone.

Prior to the lockdown, Oxfam reported that 73 percent of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest one percent, while 670 million Indians, the poorest half of the population, saw only a one percent increase in their wealth.

Moreover, the fortunes of India’s billionaires increased by almost ten times over a decade and their total wealth was higher than the entire Union budget (also referred to as the Annual Financial Statement in Article 112 of the Constitution of India), the annual budget of the Republic of India for the fiscal year 2018-19.

It is clear who these “wealth creators” create wealth for. On the People’s Review site, Tanmoy Ibrahim writes a piece on India’s billionaire class, with a strong focus on Ambani and Adani. By outlining the nature of crony capitalism in India, it is clear that Modi’s “wealth creators” are given carte blanche to plunder the public purse, people and the environment, while real wealth creators—not least the farmers—are fighting for existence.

The current struggle should not be regarded as a battle between the government and farmers. If what happened in Mexico is anything to go by, the outcome will adversely affect the entire nation in terms of the further deterioration of public health and the loss of livelihoods.

Consider that rates of obesity in India have already tripled in the last two decades and the nation is fast becoming the diabetes and heart disease capital of the world. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), between 2005 and 2015 the number of obese people doubled, even though one in five children in the five to nine-year age group were found to be stunted.

This will be just part of the cost of handing over the sector to billionaire (comprador) capitalists Mukesh Ambani and Gautum Adani and Jeff Bezos (world’s richest person), Mark Zuckerberg (world’s fourth richest person), the Cargill business family (14 billionaires) and the Walmart business family (richest in the U.S.).

These individuals are poised to siphon off the wealth of India’s agrifood sector while denying the livelihoods of many millions of small-scale farmers and local mom and pop retailers while undermining the health of the nation.

Colin Todhunter is an independent writer and former social policy researcher based in the UK and India.

—CounterPunch, February 9, 2021


1 Union budget of India
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_budget_of_India
Close to a half-billion people in India make their living in the agricultural sector. A common holding for the average farmer is only about two hectares and as such allows for little bargaining power against large corporates. This is the crux of the issue resulting in massive protests by farmers against the Narendra Modi government’s new laws designed to open agricultural markets and eliminate government price supports.

The laws mean that farmers can deal directly with private corporations, an arrangement that farmers believe puts them entirely at their mercy. Under the old system they dealt through agents, sometimes known to farm families over generations. The agents served as buyers and banks, often lending money at planting time and recouping it later.

At present farmers sell their produce mostly at wholesale markets that ensure government support prices serve as a floor. The markets are organized by committees of large landowners, commission agents who act on behalf of farmers arranging suitable storage and transport. Under the new system, private agricultural businesses, grocers and supermarkets can buy directly from farmers and government price supports have been eliminated. Farmers believe it puts them at the mercy of agro-business.

The government claims the present system will also continue but the farmers think that private buyers will first offer farmers attractive prices causing the present wholesale market system to be abandoned in a few years; after which the farmers will be at the mercy of the private players and ripe for exploitation. They believe they cannot trust or allow big business to establish prices and crops.

Centered around Delhi now, the farmer protests are aimed at closing roads entering or leaving the capital. Protests and demonstrations have been ongoing since August and have occurred across the country although most forcefully in Punjab and Haryana, the Indian breadbasket states.

Supporters include a score of farmers’ unions as well as the All-India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTE) a union of 9.5 million truckers and five million bus and taxi drivers. Any stoppage by AIMTC would bring the movement of goods and people across India almost to a halt.

Couple that to a push by protesters to disrupt rail services and it could end up with Bharat Bandh (closed India). The rails are a two-edged sword for they also affect the transport of fertilizer needed by farmers as well as other critical goods.

It is more usual for the Modi government to ignore protesters, and the fact that they are sitting down with the farmers’ representatives is an indicator of the huge voting bloc they form. Their principal demands are a repeal of the new farm laws and a re-establishment of minimum support prices. For the farmers it is a literal matter of life or death.

—Common Dreams, December 10, 2020
Eighty Israeli teenagers published an open letter addressed to top Israeli officials on Tuesday, January 5, 2021, in which they declared their refusal to serve in the army in protest of its policies of occupation and apartheid.

The so-called “Shministim Letter” (an initiative with the Hebrew nickname given to high school seniors) decrees Israel’s military control of Palestinians in the occupied territories, referring to the regime in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem as an “apartheid” system entailing “two different systems of law; one for Palestinians and another for Jews.”

“It is our duty to oppose this destructive reality by uniting our struggles and refusing to serve these violent systems—chief among them the military,” reads the letter, which was addressed to Defense Minister Benny Gantz, Education Minister Yoav Galant, and Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi.

Our refusal to enlist in the military is not an act of turning our backs on Israeli society,” the letter continues. “On the contrary, our refusal is an act of taking responsibility over our actions and their repercussions. Enlistment, no less than refusal, is a political act. How does it make sense that in order to protest against systemic violence and racism, we have to first be part of the very system of oppression we are criticizing?”

The letter further emphasizes the connection between Israel’s neoliberal and military policies:

“While the citizens of the Occupied Palestinian Territories are impoverished, wealthy elites become richer at their expense. Palestinian workers are systematically exploited, and the weapons industry uses the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a testing ground and as a showcase to bolster its sales. When the government chooses to uphold the occupation, it is acting against our interest as citizens—large portions of taxpayer money is funding the ‘security’ industry and the development of settlements instead of welfare, education, and health.”

Some of the signatories are expected to appear before the IDF conscientious objectors’ committee and be sent to military prison, while others have found ways to avoid army service. Among the signatories is Hallel Rabin, who was released from prison in November 2020 after serving 56 days behind bars. A number of the signatories also signed an open letter last June demanding that Israel stop the annexation of the West Bank.

“How are we actually protecting?”

Israelis have published a number of refusal letters ever since Israel took control of the occupied territories in 1967. While for decades the letters predominantly referred to opposing service in the occupied territories specifi-
Palestinians at checkpoints, invade forms, hold weapons, and detain the result of the decision to enlist? What such as 'who am I serving? What is the rror that will make them ask questions to reach out to those who are now occupying a civilian popu-

The desire not to enlist in the IDF is something I have been thinking about since I was eight,” Levin continues. “I did not know there was an option to refuse until around last year, when I spoke to people about not wanting to enlist, and they asked me if I was planning to refuse. I began to do some research, and that’s how I got to the letter.”

Levin adds that he signed the letter “because I believe it can do good and hopefully reach out to teenagers who, like me, do not want to enlist but do not know about the option, or will raise questions for them.”

Shahar Peretz, 18, from Kfar Yona, is planning on refusing this summer. “For me, the letter is addressed to teenagers, to those who are going to enlist in another year or those who have already enlisted,” she says. “The point is to reach out to those who are now wearing uniforms and are actually on the ground occupying a civilian population, and to provide them with a mirror that will make them ask questions such as ‘who am I serving? What is the result of the decision to enlist? What interests am I serving? Who are we actually protecting when we wear uniforms, hold weapons, and detain Palestinians at checkpoints, invade houses, or arrest children?’”

Peretz recalls her own experiences that changed her thinking around enlistment: “[My] encounter with Palestinians in summer camps was the first time I was personally and humanly exposed to the occupation. After meeting them, I realized that the army is a big part of this equation, in its influence over the lives of Palestinians under Israeli rule. This led me to understand that I am not prepared to take a direct or indirect part in the occupation of millions of people.”

Yael Amber, 19, from Hod Hasharon, is mindful of the difficulties her peers may encounter with such a decision. “The letter is not a personal criticism of 18-year-old boys and girls who enlist. Refusing to enlist is very complicated, and in many ways, it is a privilege. The letter is a call to action for young people prior to enlistment, but it is mainly a demand for [young people] to take a critical look at a system that requires us to take part in immoral acts toward another people.”

“Part of the legacy of the Nakba”

The signatories note that they hope the political atmosphere created in recent months by the nationwide anti-Netanyahu protests—known as the “Balfour protests” for the street address of the Prime Minister’s Residence in Jerusalem—will allow them to talk about the occupation.

“It’s the best momentum,” says Amber. “We have the infrastructure of Balfour, the beginning of change, and this generation is proving its political potential. We thought about it a lot in the letter—there is a group that is very interested in politics, but how do you get them to think about the occupation?”

Levin also believes that it is possible to appeal to young Israelis, particularly those who go to the anti-Bibi Netanyahu protests.

“With all the talk about corruption and the social structure of the country, we must not forget that the foundations here are rotten. Many say the military is an important process [Israelis] go through, that it will make you feel like you are part of and contributing to the country. But it is not really any of these things. The army forces 18-year-olds to commit war crimes. The army makes people see Palestinians as enemies, as a target that should be harmed.”

As the students emphasize in the letter, the act of refusal is intended to assert their responsibility to their fellow Israelis rather than disengage from them. “It is much more convenient not to think about the occupation and the Palestinians,” says Amber. “[But] Writing the letter and making this kind of discourse accessible is a service to my society. If I wanted to be different or did not care, I would not choose to put myself in a public position that receives a lot of criticism. We all pay a certain price because we care.”

“This is activism that comes from a
place of solidarity,” echoes Daniel Paldi, 18, who plans to appear before the conscientious objects’ committee. “Although the letter is first and foremost an act of protest against occupation, racism, and militarism, it is accessible. We want to make the refusal less taboo.” Paldi notes that if the committee rejects his request, he is willing to sit in jail.

“We tried not to demonize either side, including the soldiers, who, in all of its absurdity, are our friends or people our age,” he notes. “We believe that the first step in any process is the recognition of the issues that are not discussed in Israeli society.”

The signatories of the latest Shministim Letter differed from previous versions in that they touched on one of the most sensitive subjects in Israeli history: the expulsion and flight of Palestinians during the Nakba in 1948. “The message of the letter is to take responsibility for the injustices we have committed, and to talk about the Nakba and the end of the occupation,” says Shabtai Levy. “It’s a discourse that has disappeared from the public sphere and must come back.”

“It’s impossible to talk about a peace agreement without understanding that all this is a direct result of 1948,” Levy continued.

“The occupation of 1967 is part of the legacy of the Nakba. It’s part of the same manifestations of occupation, these are not different things.”

Adding to this point, Paldi concludes:

“As long as we are the occupying side, we must not determine the narrative of what does or doesn’t constitute occupation or whether it began in 1967. In Israel, language is political. The prohibition against saying ‘Nakba’ does not refer to the word itself, but rather the erasure of history, mourning, and pain.”

—972 Magazine, January 6, 2021

https://www.972mag.com/sixteens-israeli-army-objectors

2021 Shministiyot Letter

An appeal from Israeli high school seniors to refuse military enlistment

We are a group of Israeli 18-year-olds at a crossroads. The Israeli state is demanding our conscription into the military; allegedly, a defense force which is supposed to safeguard the existence of the State of Israel. In reality, the goal of the Israeli military is not to defend itself from hostile militaries, but to exercise control over a civilian population. In other words, our conscription to the Israeli military has political context and implications. It has implications, first and foremost on the lives of the Palestinian people who have lived under violent occupation for 72 years. Indeed, the Zionist policy of brutal violence towards and expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and lands began in 1948 and has not stopped since. The occupation is also poisoning Israeli society—it is violent, militaristic, oppressive, and chauvinistic. It is our duty to oppose this destructive reality by uniting our struggles and refusing to serve these violent systems—chief among them the military. Our refusal to enlist to the military is not an act of turning our backs on Israeli society. On the contrary, our refusal is an act of taking responsibility over our actions and their repercussions.

The military is not only serving the occupation, the military is the occupation. Pilots, intelligence units, bureaucratic clerks, combat soldiers, all are executing the occupation. One does it with a keyboard and the other with a machine gun at a checkpoint. Despite all of this, we grew up in the shadow of the symbolic ideal of the heroic soldier. We prepared food baskets for him in the high holidays, we visited the tank he fought in, we pretended we were him in the pre-military programs in high school, and we revered his death on Memorial Day. The fact that we are all accustomed to this reality does not make it apolitical. Enlistment, no less than refusal, is a political act.

We are used to hearing that it is legitimate to criticize the occupation only if we took an active part in enforcing it. How does it make sense that in order to protest against systemic violence and racism, we have to first be part of the very system of oppression we are criticizing?

The track upon which we embark at infancy, of an education teaching violence and claims over land, reaches its peak at age 18, with the enlistment in the military. We are ordered to put on the bloodstained military uniform and preserve the legacy of the Nakba Israeli society has been built upon these rotten roots, and it is apparent in all facets of life: in the racism, the hateful political discourse, the police brutality, and more.

This military oppression goes hand in hand with economic oppression. While the citizens of the Occupied Palestinian Territories are impoverished, wealthy elites become richer at their expense. Palestinian workers are systematically exploited, and the weapons industry uses the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a testing ground and as a showcase to bolster its sales. When the government chooses to uphold the occupation, it is acting against our interest as citizens—large portions of taxpayer money is funding the “security” industry and the development of settlements instead of welfare, education, and health.

The military is a violent, corrupt, and corrupting institution to the core. But its worst crime is enforcing the destructive policy of the occupation of Palestine. Young people our age are required to take part in enforcing closures as a means of “collective punishment,” arresting and jailing minors, blackmailing to recruit “collaborators” and more—all of these are war crimes which are executed and covered up.
every day. Violent military rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is enforced through policies of apartheid entailing two different legal systems: one for Palestinians and the other for Jews. The Palestinians are constantly faced with undemocratic and violent measures, while Jewish settlers who commit violent crimes—first and foremost against Palestinians but also against soldiers—are “rewarded” by the Israeli military turning a blind eye and covering up these transgressions. The military has been enforcing a siege on Gaza for over ten years. This siege has created a massive humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and is one of the main factors which perpetuates the cycle of violence of Israel and Hamas. Because of the siege, there is no drinkable water nor electricity in Gaza for most hours of the day. Unemployment and poverty are pervasive, and the healthcare system lacks the most basic means. This reality serves as the foundation on top of which the disaster of COVID-19 has only made things worse in Gaza.

It is important to emphasize that these injustices are not a one-time slippage or straying away from the path. These injustices are not a mistake or a symptom, they are the policy and the disease. The actions of the Israeli military in 2020 are nothing but a continuation and upholding of the legacy of massacre, expulsion of families, and land theft, the legacy which “enabled” the establishment of the State of Israel, as a proper democratic state, for Jews only.

...the Zionist policy of brutal violence towards and expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and lands began in 1948 and has not stopped since. The occupation is also poisoning Israeli society—it is violent, militaristic, oppressive, and chauvinistic...

Historically, the military has been seen as a tool which serves the “melting pot” policy, as an institution which crosscuts social class and gender divides in Israeli society. In reality, this could not be further from the truth. The military is enacting a clear program of “channeling.” Soldiers from upper-middle class are channeled into positions with economic and civilian prospects, while soldiers from lower socio-economic backgrounds are channeled into positions which have high mental and physical risk, and which do not provide the same head start in civil society. Simultaneously, women’s representation in violent positions such as pilots, tank commanders, combat soldiers, and intelligence officers, is being marketed as feminist achievement. How does it make sense that the struggle against gender inequality is achieved through the oppression of Palestinian women? These “achievements” sidestep solidarity with the struggle of Palestinian women. The military is cementing these power relations and the oppression of marginalized communities through a cynical co-opting of their struggles.

We are calling for high school seniors (shministiyot) our age to ask themselves: What and who are we serving when we enlist in the military? Why do we enlist? What reality do we create by serving in the military of the occupation? We want peace, and real peace requires justice. Justice requires acknowledgment of the historical and present injustices, and of the continuing Nakba. Justice requires reform in the form of the end of the occupation, the end of the siege on Gaza, and recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Justice demands solidarity, joint struggle, and refusal.

—Refuser Solidarity Network, February 7, 2021

https://shministim.github.io/?lang=en

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1 High school seniors
2 “…when more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs—about half of prewar Palestine’s Arab population—fled or were expelled from their homes, during the 1948 Palestine war.”

We Don’t Need New Domestic Terrorism Laws

More than 100 Civil Rights Groups agree

By SCOTT SHACKFORD

Civil rights groups across the country are urging President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, as well as Congressional Democrats, not to pass new laws to address any potential threats from white nationalists emboldened by and loyal to former President Donald Trump.

In a letter dated Tuesday, January 19, 2021, 135 civil rights organizations—ranging from religious groups, immigration advocates, and LGBT organizations to the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—expressed their concerns about calls to pass new criminal laws in the wake of the riot and temporary invasion of the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters:

“The Justice Department (DOJ), including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), has over 50 terrorism-related statutes it can use to investigate and prosecute criminal conduct, including white supremacist violence, as well as dozens of other federal statutes relating to hate crimes, organized crime, and violent crimes. The failure to confront and hold accountable white nationalist violence is not a question of not having appropriate tools to employ, but a failure to use those on hand. To date, Department Of Justice (DOJ) has simply decided as a matter of policy and practice not to prioritize white nationalist crimes.”

The letter is necessary because Biden and his administration came into the White House already planning to focus on domestic terrorism, and one possibility the transition team was mulling over is the Confronting Threats of Domestic Terrorism Act, H.R. 4192, which was introduced in 2019 by Representative Adam Schiff (Democrat–California).

The act establishes new offenses whenever somebody commits a violent crime “with the intent to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or affect the conduct of a government.” The law covers crimes such as kidnapping, murder, and assault with a dangerous weapon, as well as property damage that “creates a substantial risk of serious bodily injury to any other person.”

The signatories on the letter know exactly where this kind of legislating leads. We literally just said goodbye to a president who ordered the Department of Justice to use every federal law it could against antifa protesters. The letter observes:

“These bills and others with similar provisions are the wrong approach because, as we have seen, they will continue to be used as vehicles to target Black and Brown communities as they have done since their inception. The federal government has no shortage of counterterrorism powers, and these powers have been and will be again used to unjustly target Black and Brown communities, including Muslim, Arab, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities, as well as those engaged in First Amendment-protected activities. The creation of a new federal domestic terrorism crime ignores this reality and would not address the scourge of white nationalism in this country.”

The letter writers are not without congressional allies. Representative Rashida Tlaib (Democrat–Michigan) sent a lengthy letter of her own to congressional leaders, co-signed by nine other Democrats in the House (including New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez), warning that the federal government’s national security powers should not be expanded. Tlaib writes in part:

“While many may find comfort in the increased national security powers in the wake of this attack, we must emphasize that we have been here before and we have seen where that road leads. Our history is littered with examples of initiatives sold as being necessary to fight extremism that quickly devolve into tools used for the mass violation of the human and civil rights of the American people…”

I took note yesterday that following the September 11 attacks, many of the new authorities the federal government granted itself in order to fight terrorism ended up being used to surveil and track Americans through National Security Agency records collections and Department of Homeland Security fusion centers. While it is a relief that many people with connections to the incoming majority see the danger of expanding federal policing authority, Biden has a lengthy history of support for harsh enforcement.

What he does here will show us if he has truly changed his ways and come around on criminal justice reform.

—Reason, January 20, 2021

https://reason.com/2021/01/20/more-than-100-civil-rights-groups-agree-we-dont-need-new-domestic-terrorism-laws/
Elly Page had never seen anything like what’s happened in recent days. A senior legal adviser at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, Page has been tracking the proliferation of anti-protest bills across the U.S. since Donald Trump became president in 2017. “The number of bills we have seen in the past three weeks is unprecedented,” she said.

Since the day of the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6, at least nine states have introduced 14 anti-protest bills. The bills, which vary state by state, contain a dizzying array of provisions that serve to criminalize participation in disruptive protests. The measures range from barring demonstrators from public benefits or government jobs to offering legal protections to those who shoot or run over protesters. Some of the proposals would allow protesters to be held without bail and criminalize camping. A few bills seek to prevent local governments from defunding police.

The pushes by close to a fifth of state legislatures are part of a pattern that began to pick up speed after the summer’s uprisings in response to the police killing of George Floyd, which in many communities included significant property damage. In a handful of states, lawmakers did what they often do: introduced new legislation—however unnecessary—to show that they were responding to their constituents’ concerns.

The measures range from barring demonstrators from public benefits or government jobs to offering legal protections to those who shoot or run over protesters. Some of the proposals would allow protesters to be held without bail and criminalize camping.

The rate of new bills being offered sped up dramatically this month as lawmakers kicked off their legislative sessions at the very moment that Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol. Bills quickly arose in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island.

“There has generally been an uptick at the beginning of odd-numbered years, when most states begin their biennial legislative sessions. But this year beats prior recent years,” Page said in an email. Since January 1, she noted that 11 state legislatures have introduced 17 bills, including those filed before the Capitol insurrection. “Compare that to zero during the same period in 2020, nine in 2019, five in 2018, and 13 in 2017,” she said, adding that the 2017 spike was mostly due to North Dakota responding to that winter’s Standing Rock protests.

Because of state legislatures’ part-time schedules, most legislative sessions were over by late last summer, leaving insufficient time to pass bills that responded to the uprisings against police brutality. “We expected to see some bills this month, as state legislatures reconvened, but the number of bills and their severity is still shocking,” she said.

In Florida, lawmakers have latched on to the insurrection at the Capitol to justify a bill they’d been working on for months. “Lawmakers may be trying to take advantage of the moment and the visuals of the violent and destructive Capitol scene, to make their case—to the public and to fellow lawmakers—that these draconian new measures are necessary,” said Page.

To some observers, the timing of the bills smacked of hypocrisy. “It’s telling that so many radical right-wing state lawmakers are responding to an attack on our democracy with an attack on our
Several states also imposed stricter penalties even if they didn’t personally cause it. Significant property damage occurred, a part of a riot where injuries or serious property damage occurred, and obscure the clear distinction between First Amendment rights and a violent insurrection.

Restrictions and penalties

The rash of bills present something of a unified effort, drawing on predecessor legislation as well other states’ measures for their language.

A version of Nebraska’s bill was first described at a press conference last fall, when Republican state Senator Tom Brewer said he was inspired by Florida’s proposed legislation. Just as Florida reintroduced a version of its anti-protest law a day after the Capitol attack, Nebraska Republican lawmaker Joni Albrecht introduced her own version of a bill on January 7—a bill she told The Intercept had nothing to do with events on Capitol Hill and was modeled on a law passed in Tennessee last year.

The Nebraska bill, like many of the other states, qualifies as what Page has described as a “kitchen sink” bill: a single bill throwing “everything but the kitchen sink” at the issue of disruptive protests. Like several other states’ bills, lawmakers in Nebraska are seeking to redefine disruptive protests—in this case, upping the penalty for “riots” that include any disturbance in a public place involving at least three people obstructing government functions or putting property or people at risk.

New Nebraska penalties, like ones proposed in Mississippi and Indiana, would also punish anyone aiding a riot. Prosecutors would be able to bring felony charges against anyone who was a part of a riot where injuries or significant property damage occurred, even if they didn’t personally cause it. Several states also imposed stricter detention rules around rioting: In Nebraska, riot participants would not be eligible for bail, while proposals in Arizona and Kentucky would allow law enforcement to detain people arrested during a riot for 12 hours unless a judge deemed them unlikely to begin rioting anew.

The Nebraska bill also creates new, harsher penalties for obstructing traffic—another one of the most common recent anti-protest bill elements, included in legislation in Oklahoma, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Rhode Island, Kentucky, and Mississippi.

“Make no mistake, these bills were teed up long ago to criminalize peaceful protest, stifle speech, and obscure the clear distinction between First Amendment rights and a violent insurrection.”

In other states, bills would expand the definition of conduct that would justify use of force from bystanders against demonstrators, including things perceived as “threatening” behavior. Among these provisions, some states’ proposals would strengthen “stand your ground” laws—allowing deadly force—should a person be confronted by a “mob” or riot, including in New Hampshire; other provisions, such as in Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Florida, would protect a driver who, fleeing a riot, injures or kills someone.

For civil liberties advocates in Oklahoma, the measure warranted particular attention: Last summer, a man drove a truck with a trailer into a protest in Tulsa, but prosecutors declined to charge the driver. Nicole McAfee, director of policy and advocacy at the ACLU of Oklahoma, said the bill entrenches a culture of impunity among protest opponents and could make demonstrators think twice about engaging in a protest. "Oklahoma has no shortage of ways to punish folks," McAfee said, noting that new laws were not needed to deal with disruptive protests. “So really what this does is it chills speech.”

While most of the bills have their roots in responses to last summer’s protests against police brutality, only one of the new bills, in Minnesota, deals with oil and gas infrastructure. (Ohio passed such a bill in December and signed it into law this month.) The logic for the bill in Minnesota is clear: Indigenous-led pipeline opponents participating in a direct-action protest movement against Enbridge’s Line 3 tar sands pipeline in the state have repeatedly halted pipeline construction. The Minnesota bill focuses on individuals who aid oil pipeline protesters, including up to ten years’ imprisonment if their associate damages the property with the intent to prevent pipeline operations.

Like many of the other states’ efforts, the Minnesota bill is not exactly new. Versions of it have been introduced and rejected repeatedly in recent years—a pattern also playing out with Rhode Island’s anti-protest bill.

Several states are seeing multiple anti-protest bills at once: Indiana has seen four bills introduced since January 1. As Katie Blair, advocacy and public policy director at the ACLU of Indiana, put it, “They’re all different frankensteins.”

Civil liberties opposition

Central to the debate over the laws is their necessity. “There’s really nothing on the books about the rioting in the state of Nebraska,” said Albrecht, the lawmaker who introduced the bill. “We need to be able to clarify the difference between a peaceful protest and rioting.”

“I just don’t think that’s accurate,” said Spike Eickholt of the Nebraska ACLU. He noted that Omaha police
seemed to have no trouble making numerous arrests last summer during police brutality protests: "Whether you’re protesting or not, you don’t have any right to break someone’s car window, you don’t have any right to block the street.”

The bills have potential to do real harm, he said. In particular, Eickholt pointed to attempts in multiple states to limit bond for people who have been arrested but not yet convicted of a protest-related crime: “Other jurisdictions around the country are doing things to not be wedded forever to cash bond or to allow people to actually be able to be presumed innocent.”

Various ACLU chapters across the country view the bills with suspicion. “We believe it’s unduly harsh, it’s unnecessary, and it’s clearly aimed at protest,” said Steven Brown, ACLU Rhode Island’s executive director, of the bill in his state.

The civil liberties advocates worry that bills moving in the wake of the Capitol insurrection may find a broader range of targets once enacted. “I can only speculate, but if the alleged motivation for these bills is the attack that occurred on the Capitol, I think we can virtually guarantee that its actual implementation and enforcement will be against people of color and other protesters in very different contexts,” said Brown.

The insurrection could also help give the bills a boost. “I think the insurrection at the Capitol is something that may change the course of if these bills get hearings or not,” said Blair, of the Indiana ACLU. Advocates will have to stay on guard, she said, noting that the Indiana legislature expects hundreds more pieces of legislation during its session: “I don’t think we’re done seeing these bills.”

—The Intercept, January 21, 2021


United Front vs. Popular Front

How we fight to win

By Scott Cooper

As 2021 unfolds, the question of strategy may confront the working class in ways it has not in decades. The strength to fight back against a capital-ist onslaught of austerity coupled with an insurgent right wing will hinge on whether the working class unites itself or allies with our class enemies.

“It is not enough to possess the sword, one must give it an edge,” wrote Leon Trotsky in 1922. “It is not enough to give the sword an edge, one must know how to wield it.”

These words are found in “Report on the Question of French Communism,” in which Trotsky was working out a detailed conception of the united front in materials he prepared for the Communist International. His context then was specifically the role of communists in France. But he laid the theoretical groundwork for understanding the difference between a “united front” based on the mobilization of the working class independent of the ruling class and its political parties, the class enemy, and one based on an alliance with elements of the ruling class. The latter kind of alliance came to be known as the “popular front” (or “people’s front,”) and in every instance throughout working-class history, it has resulted in betrayal and defeat.

What is the united front?

Trotsky was discussing these questions in a context in which revolutionary mobilization was on the agenda, and in which the question was posed whether the working class could wrest power away from the bourgeoisie. His text covers, among other things, how a revolutionary organization that is smaller than other working-class parties (such as those of the social democrats) can gain the leadership of a revolutionary movement. But beyond these discussions, what Trotsky spells out is critically important for how the working class must organize generally to defend its interests.

Today, such considerations are on the agenda in the United States because murderous right-wing terrorism has arisen, a movement that is increasingly targeting—directly and violently—people of color, members of the working class more generally, and the organizations of our class. To confront this threat, many are advocating that we join forces with progressive elements in the Democratic Party, one of twin parties of U.S. capitalism, or even with the incoming Biden administration. Such an alliance is not what is meant by the united front.

In the face of clashes with the Right, the working class needs “unity in action [and] in resisting the onslaught of capitalism,” as well as “unity in taking the offensive against it.” It is a revolution-ary organization’s responsibility to take up that struggle for unity, within the context of class independence.

The united front is about providing the working class with the strength that comes from unity of action as it wages its struggles against the rulers. That unity is based on developing specific agreements for action with other forces within the workers’ movement, broadly defined, without allying with the enemy. It does not hide differences but strives to find areas where the necessary tasks can be undertaken in a coordinated manner, to make the proverbial fist out of the disparate fingers and thus create strength.

The united part of this conception does not mean a retreat from the disagreements “on fundamental questions of the working-class movement.” It means, rather, seeking agreement “in all those cases where the masses that
follow them are ready to engage in joint struggle together with the masses that follow us.” The united front compels “the reformists...to a lesser or greater degree...to become an instrument of this struggle.”

For the reformist parties and trade unions, the united front puts the onus on them to join or stand in the way. “Apart from all other considerations,” Trotsky wrote, “we are...interested in dragging the reformists from their asylums and placing them alongside ourselves before the eyes of the struggling masses.”

Through the united front, not only is the struggle strengthened, but the revolutionaries—struggling alongside activists who are unconvinced that revolutionary politics is necessary—are engaged and can be won to the perspective of going further, to overthrow capitalism. They do this as participants in the struggle, not as critics from the sidelines.

“Any party which mechanically counterposes itself to this need of the working class for unity in action,” writes Trotsky, “will unfailingly be condemned in the minds of the workers.” The task is to build a united front, with “organizational avenues” for “joint, coordinated action”—again, a front that is independent of the class enemy but that decidedly engages the “reformist organization, whether party or trade union,” and even their leaders. That engagement is both part of the strategy to win and an opportunity to break the working class away from its reformist tendencies and those reformist leaders who strive “toward conciliation with the bourgeoisie” because they “dread the revolutionary potential of the mass movement; their beloved arena is the parliamentary tribune, the trade-union bureau, the arbitration boards, the ministerial antechambers.” And it counters the “centrists” on the Left who claim to be revolutionary but who continually “vacillate” between revolutionary class independence and those reformists.

**A life-and-death issue**

In early-1920s France, the “groupings” Trotsky was seeking to bring together in a united front included the Socialist Party, the very reformists of the Second International with whom the communists had broken to create a new Communist International; the syndicalists1 organized in the French trade union movement; and the broader trade union confederations that organized the bulk of the French working class.

**Collaboration with the bourgeoisie is no different than inviting the fox into the hen house.**

A dozen years later, again in France, the question facing the working class was not a revolutionary upsurge but the necessity of mounting a life-and-death struggle against the rise of fascism. In late 1935, Trotsky’s conception of the united front confronted a new “coalition of the proletariat with the imperialist bourgeoisie,” as Trotsky described the “people’s front”—in other words, the very alliance with the class enemy he had warned against in 1922.

The idea had come from the bureaucratic caste that controlled the Soviet Union and its leader, Joseph Stalin. It was developed to defend that caste’s interests from threats both internal and external—but not the threats you might immediately imagine. Stalin feared nothing more than proletarian revolution in other countries of the world, which would challenge him and his band of counterrevolutionary thugs who had solidified their grasp over the Soviet Union and its revolution of 1917. It became the prevailing approach by those who followed Stalin’s ideas—even well beyond his death. It was the codification of abandoning class independence and putting the working class firmly in league with its class enemy.

In France, the “privileged position” in that alliance was given over to the so-called Radical Party, the front’s main bourgeois organization. Workers were relegated to propping up the bourgeois members of the coalition.

“The greatest danger in France lies in the fact that the revolutionary energy of the masses will be dissipated in spurts...and give way to apathy. Only conscious traitors or hopeless muddle-heads are capable of thinking that in the present situation it is possible to hold the masses immobilized up to the moment

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1. The term “syndicalists” refers to a strand of anarchist and revolutionary labor unionism that advocates for the creation of workers’ councils to eventually govern society.

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United protest in support of Alabama Amazon workers’ union organizing drive, Huntsville, Alabama, February 20, 2021. (supportamazonworkers.org)
when they will be blessed from above by the government of the People’s Front. Strikes, protests, street clashes, direct uprisings are absolutely inevitable in the present situation. The task of the proletarian party consists not in checking and paralyzing these movements but in unifying them and investing them with the greatest possible force. …

“The situation can be saved only by aiding the struggling masses to create a new apparatus, in the process of the struggle itself, which meets the requirements of the moment.”

That is the task of building the united front, independent of the class enemy. In France at the time, this was embodied in the concept of “Committees of Action”—important “as the only means of breaking the anti-revolutionary opposition of party and trade-union apparatus” (emphasis in the original.)

In a recent article, I discussed the meaning of the terms “fascism” and “fascist” and reviewed Trotsky’s call in December 1931 “For a Worker’s United Front against Fascism” in Germany. In that piece, he articulates the perspective of mass mobilization—a joint struggle by the entire working class, through its parties and organizations, to destroy the fascists and even prepare the working class for a direct struggle for power—that includes, if necessary, taking up arms for mass self-defense. According to this perspective, fascism is a war unleashed by the bourgeoisie at a moment when it sees crushing the working class and its organizations as the last hope for preserving capitalist rule. For this reason, it becomes decisive to maintain the critical independence from the class enemy of a united front—in direct contradiction to the popular front, which is an alliance with the class enemy.

Trotsky’s 1935 article on France elaborates this point. “Such tasks as the creation of workers’ militia, the arming of the workers, the preparation of a general strike,” he writes, “will remain on paper if the struggling masses themselves, through their authoritative organs, do not occupy themselves with these tasks” (emphasis in the original.)

The popular front’s litany of defeat

From the 1930s to today, the popular front approach has proved itself to be not only counterrevolutionary but also deadly. In the period from 1934 to 1939, when the political alliance subordinated the interests of the working class to the bourgeoisie and its capitalist political parties, it helped facilitate fascism’s solidification and expansion of power.

Whether we are confronting a rising right-wing threat, even fascism, or we are fighting the attacks that are sure to come from the Biden administration, our class independence will be decisive.

The strategy was adopted in Spain at the beginning of 1936 as an electoral coalition among ostensibly revolutionary organizations and supporters of a Spanish republic organized in bourgeois parties. It was Stalin’s Comintern that pushed for a coalition with anyone, including the class enemy, that declared its opposition to fascism. And thus the hopes of the Spanish workers and peasants were subordinated to the bourgeoisie.

The Popular Front (the actual name of the electoral coalition) won the 1936 election but failed to prepare the working class to defend itself. That summer, the generals instigated a coup d’état and sparked the Spanish Civil War. Class collaboration stymied the workers’ movement in the fight, and the Communist Party—seeking to shore up its alliances beyond Spain, especially its pact with Hitler aimed at preventing a Nazi attack on the Soviet Union—evenually chose the bourgeoisie over providing material aid to Spanish workers.

In May 1936 in France, the Popular Front (also the electoral coalition’s name) won the legislative elections and formed a government that was first headed by Léon Blum, the leader of the social democratic party known then as the SFIO (Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière, French Section of the Workers’ International) and today as the Socialist Party. Almost immediately, the French workers’ movement launched a general strike to win the social reforms that it expected a popular front government would grant. And to be sure, some reforms were won—including large wage increases and the 40-hour work week.

But the situation in Europe, the persistence of the global Depression, the rise of fascism, and the growing threat of war posed a solution for the working class that was antithetical to the popular front: the overthrow of capitalism. Things were exacerbated by high unemployment and runaway inflation. The ruling class was desperate to supercharge its arms industry for the coming war. Everything the working class had won stood in the way.

How could revolution be accomplished if the working class was organized in an alliance with part of the capitalist class? It is not a rhetorical question.

After World War II, the popular front approach continued as the Stalinists led workers into alliances with the bourgeoisie in France and Italy—so-called “Liberation” governments, to tamp down revolutionary upsurges by workers. These alliances with the capitalists also put the workers’ movement in cahoots with bourgeoisies bound and determined to crush the growing anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Fifty years ago, in September 1970, the people of Chile elected a popular
front government that ended up leading to disaster. Salvador Allende won a narrow plurality in the presidential election. He was the candidate of Unidad Popular (Popular Unity,) yet another alliance between the Stalinist and social democratic parties with various other forces on the Left and parties that represented the liberal wing of the Chilean bourgeoisie. In an example of history’s morbid sense of humor, these included a Radical Party (just like in France.)

Allende’s election as president was secured when another bourgeois party, the Christian Democrats, decided to vote in favor of his candidacy when the election was thrown to the Chilean National Congress.

In power, the Popular Unity government of Allende pursued “la vía chilena al socialismo” (the Chilean way to socialism,) nationalizing some large-scale industries and redistributing some land. Big landowners balked. Financiers began to agitate against the government. The Catholic Church expressed its opposition to educational reforms that lessened its role in the country’s schools. As the Christian Democrats and other bourgeois components of the popular front abandoned ship, the situation for the Chilean working class grew more and more tenuous.

On September 11, 1973, Allende was overthrown in a bloody military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet, backed by the U.S. government and largely organized and funded by the CIA. The coupists butchered some 30,000 workers and peasants, particularly targeting leftists of all stripes. Close to 100,000 people were forced to flee to other countries, where for years they were hunted down and murdered by Pinochet’s secret police as part of a terror campaign organized by the CIA—Operation Condor. In the meanwhile, the Chilean junta imposed brutal economic austerity that decimated the standard of living of the Chilean people as the country’s ruling class enriched itself at their expense.

Allende’s popular front in Chile had sown the seeds of its own destruction at the hands of the generals, who, working on behalf of the ruling class, launched a coup that paved the way for the bloody defeat of the working class. To win confirmation in the Congress, Unidad Popular succumbed to the demands of the class enemy that would ensure that the institutions of capitalist rule were maintained, and that bourgeois order would persist. One of the most important of these demands made it easy for the military to slaughter the people: a prohibition on the creation of “private” (that is, workers’) militias and a firm agreement that no police or military officers would be appointed who had not been trained in the bourgeoisie’s established academies.

In the face of clashes with the Right, the working class needs “unity in action [and] in resisting the onslaught of capitalism,” as well as “unity in taking the offensive against it.” It is a revolutionary organization’s responsibility to take up that struggle for unity, within the context of class independence.

Allende’s cabinet put the most right-leaning, class-collaborationist of the alliance’s “Left” forces, the social democrats, in charge of internal security. The liberal Radical Party got the ministry of national defense. The die was cast.

The political regime inherited from that coup is at the very foundation of the uprisings that erupted in Chile in the latter part of 2019.

Lessons for today

The popular front strategy not only failed to stop fascism in the 1930s. It has proved, time and again, to be a path to defeat of the working class. Collaboration with the bourgeoisie is no different than inviting the fox into the hen house. And as the Chilean experience shows, the ruling class will put the shackles on advancing revolution at every turn. In that case, it demanded the country’s constitution be amended to prevent the workers from arming themselves to defend their gains and their lives.

Today, we confront a growing far-right insurgency that is targeting people of color, immigrants, the entire working class. As capitalism’s economic and social crisis worsens, being fueled by the pandemic, this force may become a direct tool of the bourgeoisie’s efforts to maintain its hold on power and its ability to continue to exploit us. Will we fight that with our own power, or will we follow the deadly example of the popular front?

History makes clear which choice guarantees defeat and which offers us a chance to survive and win. Whether we are confronting a rising right-wing threat, even fascism, or we are fighting the attacks that are sure to come from the Biden administration, our class independence will be decisive. The strategy and tactics that the working class chooses today and tomorrow have costs.

—Left Voice, January 16, 2021


1 “Syndicalism is a radical current in the labor movement that was most active in the early 20th century. Its main idea is the establishment of local worker-based organizations and the advancement of the demands and rights of workers through strikes. …”

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

“Natural scientists may adopt whatever attitude they please, they are still under the domination of philosophy. It is only a question whether they want to be dominated by a bad, fashionable philosophy or by a form of theoretical thought which rests on acquaintance with the history of thought and its achievements.”
—Engels

In a recent correspondence with a well-educated friend, a scientist and a teacher, he referred to a philosophy course he had taken as an undergraduate as “One of the most painful times in my studies was when I took a module on philosophical models of the human mind. I thought it was shite. Pages and pages to say little or nothing.”

I can understand that reaction. I have encountered some such books and have even put myself through the torture of reading Althusser. It is wrong however to condemn all of philosophy for the failure of some teachers or incomprehensible books. Both should serve to stimulate interest, take students on a journey of exploration through the history of the development of philosophical ideas, showing how they have helped shape our world and the way we think. The teacher should be a guide who explains the meanings of the terminology and concepts that are particular to philosophy so that each student may study at their own pace and level of interest. (I used to regularly tell my students not to believe anything that I say—go check the matter out for yourself.)

When I first encountered Calculus, I found it incomprehensible so gave up. Marx has written that we all should study Calculus, “It is the mathematics of change,” so this omission was always at the back of my mind. Some years later when I was studying physical chemistry, which has many calculations, I realized that they were almost all Calculus and it was now making sense. Context can make all of the difference.

I also see parallels with people who say, “I don’t do politics.”

“In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics.’ All issues are political issues…” —George Orwell

Whether we want to acknowledge it or not our lives are governed by politics. We can choose to passively accept the political processes affecting us or become active participants. Similarly, with scientists. However, much they express contempt for politics and philosophy (referred to as Micky Mouse degrees) they influence our lives and
our thinking profoundly.

Every scientist and teacher of science has the choice to ignore this fact or to understand and integrate this into their work.

Science teachers not only explain the laws of their science but introduce students to a new language and new concepts. Words do not always mean the same in the external world as they do to scientists. While each scientific discipline has its own language and infinite numbers of abbreviations and acronyms, all can be learned in time. Above all the teacher should stimulate the students’ interest so that they will use philosophy to help them develop a deeper understanding of their particular fields of study. For a few that will be philosophy itself. Thank goodness for the diversity of interests that individual humans have. Those with the most passion for their subject wish to share it and if we understand any subject, we should be able to explain it to anyone. Every academic field has its own history, jargon, terminology, concepts and traditions which apply to the sciences and philosophy. These are often a barrier to the outsider or newcomer, but it is the teacher’s job to make these accessible to every student, to make the subject interesting to all and to help those who are developing a deeper interest to follow their passion.

My friend’s experience with philosophy teaching is one case where “shooting the messenger” might be appropriate. Two-and-a-half-thousand-years of human intellectual endeavor whose purpose was to help us understand our world and our place in it should have been an exciting and uplifting experience or at least quite interesting. No, it was boring and incomprehensible and as the teacher was a paid public servant also reprehensible. We all know the names of many philosophers — Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Kant, Marx and others and though we may know little of their works, we are aware that their ideas have made a contribution to our cultural heritage that has been worth preserving, in some cases for millennia. Learning should never cause any student pain and to discourage them from an interest in philosophy for life. No teacher could argue that was a success.

Philosophy, literally, the love of knowledge, is essentially about trying to understand the true nature of the world. But more forcefully, philosophy demands “Why do you think that?”—a question that every scientist should put to themselves every day—not just scientists, everyone.

For Marxists, objective knowledge is the starting point for changing the world for the better.

I am writing this in September 2020 and what is true and what is truth are among the most important questions of today. Politicians’ lying has reached an industrial scale in the UK and in Trump’s USA. Statistics have always been doctored and facts manipulated by political careerists but at present it is genuinely true has become almost meaningless. We had politicians telling us recently that “We’ve had enough of experts” which is dangerous anti-intellectualism.

Truth used to be what is written in the Bible, for many it still is, as is the Quran for Muslims.

The first thing that philosophy did for humanity was to challenge these absolute controls religion had on knowledge and thinking.

“Truth is a process. From the subjective idea, man advances towards objective truth through practice (and technique).” —Lenin

For Marxists, the truth, though never absolute, is fundamental. We start work from the objective conditions we find, face their living reality and base all of our analysis, program and strategy on what we believe to be true.

Meaningless propaganda and deceit do not advance the class struggle of science in the slightest and have their own dynamic that leads only to disappoint-

The Marxist outlook called dialectical materialism is the descendant of two-and-a-half-thousand-years of the progress in philosophy from its origins in ancient Asia Minor to the present day. While having its own particular viewpoint, Marxism always acknowledges the contributions of its antecedents, “it is built on the shoulders of giants” and contemporary philosophers who also seek genuine truths.

What have philosophers done for us?

Above all, philosophers have paved the way for our modern secular, educated world by challenging the authority of the church and its sanctified texts. Philosophers have helped to free scientists from the constraints of the scholasticism imposed on them by the Bible and a few authorized ancients backed by the very real threat of punishment and death. The world Philip Pullman created in His Dark Materials would be like one where philosophy had not triumphed and where the religious authorities control all education and scientific research.

What Philosophers have given us

Epistemology. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. This branch of philosophy investigates how we obtain knowledge of the world. It challenges the tradition of obtaining knowledge from the classical scripts. Empiricism, which is the foundation stone of all modern science, is one of its progenies. Observation and experiment, recording and measuring are still the empirical means of obtaining knowledge today. Theories are put to the test and either confirmed or refuted in practice in the lab or in the real world.

Scientific theories and practices change over time, epistemology keeps abreast of these developments and attempts to provide more generalized conclusions from them.

Empiricists from Francis Bacon and
Locke onwards fought and won the battle to remove god and superstition from the laboratory and all fields of scientific investigation which was a monumental achievement for humanity.

Epistemology, however, has shown that despite all the claims of absolute objectivity claimed by empiricists, they live in the real world and carry a lot of intellectual baggage and subjective bias into their scientific research. It is the criticism of philosophers that is among the agents that promote improvements in the methods of investigation and refinement of scientific theories.

Whether the researcher is aware of it or not, the 20th century philosopher Karl Popper has had a profound influence on scientific thinking particularly in the UK. Popper introduced the concept of “falsification” into the scientific lexicon and practice. For a theory to be genuinely scientific, Popper showed that it had to be capable of being “falsified” that is of being proven wrong. Theories that cannot be tested and falsified are not scientific and more akin to religious precepts. Popper went on to argue that real scientific progress occurs when established theories are proven wrong.

A contemporary of Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, introduced the term and concept that scientists in their normal work operate within a paradigm. A paradigm sets the theoretical, technical and cultural framework that scientists operate in at a particular period. In time, data begins to accumulate that throws into question the established outlook. Eventually an intellectual crisis is reached when a new paradigm emerges that replaces its predecessor. This was what happened in the 20th century with the replacement of classical Newtonian physics by the new physics of Einstein and quantum mechanics.

A similar process is currently underway in evolutionary biology. The classical Darwinian model of steady, continuous evolutionary development in its contemporary form expressed as, “Climbing Mount Improbable,” is being challenged by the fossil and genetic evidence. This lead Stephen Jay Gould and his associates to develop the theory of “punctuated equilibrium” that is in tune with the actual paleontological evidence and contemporary genetic studies.

Although not universally accepted, punctuated equilibrium has been demonstrated in the evolution of land plants and more recently between Homo sapiens and our recently extinct relatives. This is the new paradigm that is challenging the established neo-Darwinian view in evolutionary biology.

In medical research the randomized double-blind trial is the latest and most objective method for obtaining correct information about a drug’s or a treatment’s effectiveness by eliminating the subjective experience of the patients and the bias of the clinicians treating them. It is a product of both empirical experience and epistemology which continually challenges established ideas and practices demanding that they account for themselves in a changing world. Today’s intellectual methods will most certainly be developed upon, and is paving the way for, even higher levels of scientific achievement.

From its early and clumsy beginnings, empiricism has been developed and refined through scientific practice and industry over recent centuries to become what we call the “scientific method” that underpins all of our methodology today. Put simply, epistemology says, “Show us your evidence and explain to us how you got it.”

Logic. Logic teaches us how to differentiate between good and bad thinking and how to construct valid arguments.

It asks every scientist—by what method did you arrive at that conclusion?

Laws of logic were first elucidated by Plato’s student Aristotle. A equals A, B equals B, these are known as the laws of identity. A does not equal B, is the law of non-identity. A thing cannot be A and B at the same time, is the law of the excluded middle. We use these laws of logic unconsciously all of the time. “This is a cup; this is a spoon. This cup is not a spoon.” We categorize everything in our world continuously. This is essential to negotiate our way in the world, to feed, survive and reproduce should we decide.

In science these laws may be less obvious, but they are operating in our minds all of the time and at all levels from the simple to the cosmological, “This is a pipette”—to cutting edge science— “That is a Higgs boson.” “This is a healthy cell,” or “That is a malignant cell.” “This is an X chromosome” and “It is not a Y chromosome.”

How simple, how mundane, but it took the genius of Aristotle to identify this as the principal foundation of our thinking. Once an intellectual action has been identified it can then be applied consciously and consistently just like the laws of science.

Aristotle also taught us the principles of syllogism—the logical presentation of a point of view or argument. (He would have called this dialectic.) All women are mortal, she is a woman, therefore she is mortal.

Marxism is dialectical materialism. Dialectics, the philosophy of change, has been at the heart of discussion since the beginning of philosophy. Marxism has adopted the laws of dialectical logic elucidated by Hegel and given them a materialist foundation. All scientific work from a simple lab report to a doctoral thesis must be consistent with the principles of logic that Aristotle first elucidated.

To be awarded a PhD, the candidate must not only show impeccable research but also impeccable logic and grammar.

When we first begin to talk, we unconsciously employ the rules of grammar of the language spoken around us. We generally put nouns and verbs in the appropriate place. But the
tenses of verbs can be a problem. At school we learn to apply the principles of grammar consciously and systematically. This not only improves our ability to convey our ideas to others effectively, it also enables us to appreciate more fully what others are saying or writing, whether in a scientific report or a work of literature. Some people come so enthralled by the principles of grammar that they make its study their career. So too with the principles of logic.

By consciously applying the laws of logic to any work that scientists produce they will be consistent in collating and analyzing the data, presenting the conclusions, and addressing them in the context of the current paradigm of their field. Logic facilitates the communication of and correct understanding of scientific ideas not only by our scientist peers but by the people of the wider world who support our work.

For example were I to have a discussion with a cosmologist about the Big Bang and the evolution of the cosmos, the cosmologist would be able to explain at my level of comprehension what she understands to be the current state of knowledge in her field. In return I would be able to explain to her, her bee-sting allergy, or other immunological complaint using language that she too would understand. We both know that while we are from different spheres of study, we have a common scientific methodology so that we each know what each of us saying is as close to the truth as we are at present. (Popper called this verisimilitude.) I believe that I could also explain the most complex of immunological processes or conditions to any geneticist or member of the general public in terms that they could comprehend.

The people working in scientific fields have a wide spectrum of reasons and backgrounds. For some it is simply a nine-to-five-job that gives them the money to live while for others it is a lifetime’s obsession. There are atheists, Christians, Muslims and Jews, communists and conservatives working in science yet whatever their reasons or subjective beliefs, all are subject to the same scientific criteria and methodological principles while investigating, recording and reporting their findings. The constant analysis and criticism of theories by philosophers has made a significant contribution to scientific progress by identifying subjectivity, bias and inconsistent logic.

Contemporary science owns much to philosophy as it is built on the pillars of epistemology and logic. But equally scientific progress continues to be the life blood of philosophy—it is mutual co-evolution.

Philosophical rigor facilitates good scientific practice, analysis and presentation of conclusions. While science and its offspring industry continue to provide philosophers with a myriad of new developments and products that fuel discussion and challenge intellectual complacency in philosophy.

Metaphysics. Metaphysics is “seeking the answers to life, the universe and everything”—literally meaning beyond physics. This branch of philosophy raises questions about the nature of the natural world from the atomic to the cosmological and our relation to it. It looks to all branches of human endeavor and seeks to find connections and generalizations.

Metaphysics asks the profound questions—what is the reality of the physical world, can we ever truly know it, is there a meaning to life, do we have a soul? Is there a god?

While the debates in this field of philosophy have little immediate interest to most scientists the evidence provided by science is used in the discussions around all of these issues. (In the works of Marx and Engels, the term metaphysics has a different meaning. To them it meant those who did not think dialectically.)

Ethics. Ethics, or moral philosophy seeks to address questions about how we should live our lives, what we consider proper behavior, and what constitutes “the good life.” While these were personal matters for scientists until recently, ethical behavior has now become integral to scientific practice. Every scientific or medical research study that involves human or animal subjects now has to be submitted to the institution’s ethics committee for approval. Researchers now have to incorporate the organization’s ethical policies into any proposed project and have been forced to examine their own attitudes to human and animal subjects. All now have to assess the importance of their investigations and justify their contribution to society.

Aesthetics. Aesthetics deals with matters such as beauty, art and good taste. While this may be the sphere of philosophy least interesting to most scientists, most scientific meetings now award a prize for the best posters, so appreciation of art is combining with science.

At root is the fundamental matter of freedom of expression, which is essential for all scientists as well as artists. The individual’s right to question authority and express their own opinions in every sphere of human activity, including science, is paramount to a civilized society.

Philosophy is a skill that is learned like any other skill. It is an intellectual activity, but does not diminish the necessity of its study and practice. As with any subject, some people have a natural affinity while others may have a mathematical gift or a passion for beetles. All students start from relative ignorance and progress to a thorough understanding of a subject at different rates. Some need to do little revision while others need to study intensely and seek all sorts of memory aids when exams are involved.

The disparaging of philosophy in some academic quarters reflects the low importance that it has had in the
British education system despite many of the great pioneers being British. It is an intellectual skill whose principles all students should have knowledge of and be exposed to as it encourages us, above all, to think critically. In France philosophy is a core subject in the Baccalauréat, the essential qualification for university entrance.

The modern scientist owes much to philosophers and to the ideas they have bequeathed us. From the earliest beginnings when Thales began to question the role of gods in human affairs, to the renaissance when the authority of the Catholic church over all human activities temporal and intellectual was challenged then overthrown, philosophers have been in the vanguard of intellectual freedom. There are many martyrs among them who put truth and the right to express their ideas publicly before their own life. It is no accident that Carl Sagan’s monumental work, Cosmos, A Personal Voyage, begins with a tribute not to a scientist but to the radical philosopher Giordano Bruno. He was martyred for refusing to conform to the dictates of the hierarchy of outmoded Catholic religion who in spite of the evidence, maintained that the sun revolved around the earth. The scientist Galileo capitulated and recanted, to be condemned to house arrest for the remainder of his life. Bruno, the philosopher, refused to renounce his views and after imprisonment was eventually burned at the stake in Rome on February 17, 1600.

“What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know?” —C.L.R. James.

This could apply to many scientists, too. Philosophy puts all of our sciences in their historical, intellectual and social context providing a medium for a more comprehensive and universal appreciation of the work we do. Logic also teaches us how to think consistently, what questions to ask, how to address problems, how to approach an investigation, how to analyze information and how to convey our discoveries correctly to our peers and to broader society. These are carried out all of the time by scientists but how much more effective when we consciously use the tool that has been made to help us do this—logic.

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No topic of study should ever be painful for any student.

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Over the many years since leaving school I have lived through many awful lectures as a student and later during peer appraisal when I was a lecturer myself. I have witnessed the most interesting of subjects reduced to an excruciatingly long monotone. No topic of study should ever be painful for any student. The good teachers who know their subjects well can convey them to anyone in a language that they will understand. But like an angler is always throwing out bait, a teacher is fishing to identify the points that will capture each student’s attention and interest. Philosophy, if presented thoughtfully, sensitively and passionately, is and should be accessible to everyone, it is our common inheritance and, like the sciences, a monumental tribute to human intellectual achievement.

Much of contemporary philosophical literature is written in language and terminology that is incomprehensible to most scientists. It is philosophers talking to other philosophers to the exclusion of everyone else. Thus, an intellectual rift has developed where different sides hold the others in contempt to some degree. This contains a germ of anti-intellectualism which is always reactionary.

Seekers after truth in whatever field are marching together with a common interest and objective. Knowledge and understanding of our universe and our place in it come from a multitude of sources and disciplines.

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1 Anti-Dühring
2 Louis Pierre Althusser was a French Marxist philosopher. He was born in Algeria and studied at the École normale supérieure in Paris, where he eventually became Professor of Philosophy. Althusser was a longtime member—although sometimes a strong critic—of the French Communist Party.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Althusser
Cuba’s socialist approach to developing vaccines against COVID-19 differs strikingly from that of capitalist nations of the world. Cuba’s production of four vaccines is grounded in science and dedicated to saving the lives of all Cubans, and to international solidarity.

The New York Times’s running report on the world’s vaccine programs shows 67 vaccines having advanced to human trials; 20 of them are in the final phase of trials or have completed them. The United States, China, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, South Korea, and India have each produced many vaccines; most vaccine-manufacturing countries are offering one or two vaccines.

Cuba is the only vaccine manufacturer in Latin America; there are none in Africa. The only state-owned entities producing the leading vaccines are those of Cuba and Russia.

Cuba’s Finlay Vaccine Institute has produced two COVID-19 vaccines. Trials for one of them, called Sovereign I, focus on protecting people previously infected with COVID-19. The antibody levels of some of them turned out to be low, and the vaccine might provide a boost.

The other vaccine, Sovereign II, is about to enter final human trials. For verifying protection, these trials require tens-of-thousands of subjects, one half receiving the vaccine and the other half, a placebo vaccine. Cuba’s population is relatively small, 11 million people, too small to yield enough infected people in the short time required to test the vaccine’s protective effect. That’s why Sovereign II will be tested in Iran.

One-hundred-million doses of Sovereign II are being prepared, enough to immunize all 11 million Cubans, beginning in March or April. The 70 million remaining doses will go to Vietnam, Iran, Pakistan, India, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua. Sovereign II "will be the vaccine of ALBA [Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America],” explained Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, referring to the solidarity alliance established in 2004 by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Cuba’s Fidel Castro.

"Cuba’s strategy in commercializing the vaccine represents a combination of what’s good for humankind and the impact on world health. We are not a multinational where a financial objective comes first,” says Vicente Vérez Bencomo, director of Cuba’s Finlay Vaccine Institute. Income generated by vaccine sales abroad will pay for healthcare, education, and pensions in Cuba just as happens with exports of medical services and medicines.

Cuba’s Center for Genetic and Biotechnological Engineering is developing two other COVID-19 vaccines; one, named “Mambisa” (signifying a female combatant in wars of liberation from Spain), is administered via the nasal route, just as is Cuba’s hepatitis B vaccine. The other vaccine, named “Abdala” (a character in a Jose Marti poem) is administered intramuscularly. The two vaccines are involved in early trials.

Cuba was ready

Cuban education emphasizes science and technology. In the 1990s, Cuba accounted for 11 percent of doctorate-level Latin American scientists. Cuban scientists work in the 50 or so biomedical research and production facilities which together make up Cuba’s state-owned BioCubaFarma Corporation, and which produces vaccines, drugs, medical tests, and medical equipment. It makes 60 percent of medicines used in Cuba, and eight of 12 vaccines.

Cuba previously produced a pioneering vaccine that prevents life-threatening infection caused by type B meningococcus. Cuba developed a genetically-engineered hepatitis B vaccine and a vaccine offering palliative treatment for lung cancer. A Cuba-developed vaccine offers protection against infection, particularly childhood meningitis, caused by the Hemophilus Influenza type B bacterium.
In fashioning vaccines, Cuban scientists relied on familiar technology.

To provide an immunological extra, the antigen of Cuba’s Sovereign II vaccine is mixed with tetanus toxoid, as was done with Cuba’s Hemophilus influenza vaccine. As with other vaccines, scientists used a segment of the virus’s protein—here the COVID-19 virus—to form an antigen to stimulate protective antibodies. By contrast, the U. S. Pfizer and Moderna vaccines contain the whole viral protein, not a segment. That protein contains “genetic instructions” which enter human cells, causing them “to make spike proteins, which then get released into the body” where they trigger antibodies.

Observers suggest that this innovative U. S. technology may be less expensive than the one used in Cuban vaccines. Not requiring extremely cold storage, as do the U. S. vaccines, the Cuban vaccines are suited for areas without adequate refrigeration capabilities.

Cuba’s bio-medical production sector has also created drugs for treating COVID-19 infection. Interferon, an antiviral agent developed in Cuba, produced in China, and used throughout the world, prevents many COVID—infected patients from becoming critically ill. The Cuban anti-inflammatory drug Jusvinza, used for treating autoimmune diseases, and Cuba’s monoclonal antibody Itolizumab, which moderates exaggerated immune responses, are both effective in reducing COVID-19 deaths.

The other way
The U. S. approach to producing and distributing COVID-19 vaccines is based on private enterprise, although the U. S. government did deliver billions-of-dollars to pharmaceutical companies to produce vaccines free of charge to recipients. The companies have contracted with purchasers abroad.

According to forbes.com in November 2020, “If Moderna’s [vaccine] can get FDA approval and can make enough doses, its top line could be nearly $35 billion higher…than…in the last 12 months.” Another report suggests that, “The companies (Pfizer and Moderna) stand to earn billions-of-dollars in profits from their COVID vaccines this year [and] there will be more profits in later years.” The companies “claim the rights to vast amounts of intellectual property.”

With corporations in charge, distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is skewed. As of Jan. 27, “some 66.83 million doses have been sent out, of which 93 percent were supplied to only 15 countries.” In Latin America, only Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile have secured purchase contracts adequate for immunizing entire populations. The companies’ contracts with African nations allow for immunization of only 30 percent of Africans in 2021. Meaningful immunization has yet to begin there.

The wealth divide determines distribution. Epidemiologists at Duke University report that, “While high-income countries represent only 16 percent of the world’s population, they currently hold 60 percent of the vaccines for COVID-19 that have been purchased so far.” Cuban journalist Randy Alonso reports that only “27 percent of the total population of low and middle income countries can be vaccinated this year.”

“The world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure—and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries,” declared Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director of the World Health Organization, on January 18. He warned that, “some countries and companies continue to prioritize bilateral deals, going around COVAX, driving up prices and attempting to jump to the front of the queue.”

The WHO initiated the global vaccine collaboration COVAX to assure access by poor nations to COVID-19 vaccines. The 190 nations that are enrolled agreed to obtain vaccines through COVAX. Rich nations would supply COVAX with funds to enable 90 poor nations to receive no-charge vaccines. COVAX anticipates distributing two billion doses, enough to immunize only 25 percent of the populations of poor nations during 2021.

Problems include wealthy nations order vaccines independent of COVAX; they buy more vaccine than they need; manufacturers set prices; and prices are secret, variable, and very high.

Most other countries producing COVID-19 vaccines are at variance with Cuba through their profiteering and because they are complicit with the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba. Pursuing routine overseas commercial affairs, they all too easily adjust to U.S. regulations by means of which that cruel policy is enforced. More to the point, the U.S. blockade hinders Cuba’s vaccine efforts, and they are silent.

“We don’t have in Cuba all the raw materials and supplies we’ll need for the unprecedented scale of production that vaccinating our whole population requires,” Dagmar Garcia-Rivera, Director of Research at Cuba’s Finlay Vaccine Institute, explained. “They have to be purchased and for this, we need financing. This is made infinitely more difficult by the U.S. embargo…Procuring the necessary reagents for research and the raw materials for production is a challenge we face daily.”

In confronting the pandemic, Cuba exhibits attention to detail suggestive of a level of caring and concern not readily matched elsewhere. For example, Cuba’s government-friendly cubadebate.cu website provides a daily, detailed update of the infection’s impact. Its report on January 27 presents data relating to cities, provinces, the nation, and the world—and the nation’s intensive care units. Readers
Ernie Tate was born in 1934 in the Shankill Road, heart of Protestant Belfast. In 1955 at the age of 21 he migrated to Canada and within a year had become a member of the Canadian Trotskyist organization, the Socialist Educational League.

In 1966 Ernie met Jess Mackenzie, an immigrant from Scotland, and from then on, they formed an unbreakable personal and political partnership. Ernie had been asked to move to Britain as the part of the international aid being provided by North American Trotskyists to establish a British section of the Fourth International and Jess moved to join him.

Jess and Ernie worked at the newly-established political headquarters of the International Marxist Group (IMG), a few rooms above a Polish butcher in Toynbee Street, near Brick Lane. From there they ran the Pioneer Book Service, which was financed by the American Socialist Workers Party and which provided Marxist books at a time when writings by Trotsky, Mandel or Lenin could not be found in mainstream bookshops, and the Internet did not exist. They also worked on the IMG’s political projects and Jess was for a time organizer of the IMG’s small London branch.

Vietnam

The 1965 World Congress of the Fourth International asked its sections to turn towards solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle. The IMG was instrumental in forming the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), in which Ernie was a leading light. Through this, Ernie became known to wider sections of the Left, and the campaign enabled him to put his engaging personality to good political use. He and Jess embodied some of the best features of the North American Trotskyist tradition at that time—calm and reasoned judgement, together with organizational seriousness. Ernie combined that with boundless good humor, a dry wit and a winning smile. He was the opposite of the caricatured hard-bitten Trotskyist fanatic, a caricature that political isolation made all-too-often a reality.

To build the VSC meant working with some of the well-known left wingers who supported the campaign, like engineering union executive member Ernie Roberts, Marxist academic Ralph Miliband, members of the New Left Review team like Quintin Hoare and Perry Anderson—and crucially Tariq Ali, former President of the Oxford University student union, a highly effective speaker and VSC’s best known figure. At this time the IMG’s best known public figure was Ken Coates, a Nottingham University lecturer, a prolific writer on workers controls and an effective speaker. But Coates was moving to the right and publicly broke with the VSC just as it was about to take off, attacked the organization’s critical stance towards the transport workers union over a London dock strike, and was out of the IMG by April 1967.

The formation of the VSC was a brilliant political move by the IMG, and once it got going it was quickly supported by the International Socialists (now SWP). The near genocidal bombing of Vietnamese peasants and the air assault on North Vietnam caused mass outrage and helped fuel the growing student rebellion in Britain and around the world. Growing militancy among the student youth did not sit well with the moderation of the Communist party-backed British Council for Peace in Vietnam, which called only for negotiations. VSC revived the idea of solidarity, unconditional support for the oppressed in struggle, resuming in some ways the mood of the Left during the Spanish Civil War.

Ernie, Jess and Pat Jordan were all involved in organizing the VSC’s first major demonstration in October 1967, which finished with clashes outside the old American Embassy in Grosvenor Square. The National Liberation Front’s spectacular Tet Offensive at the end of January 1968 fueled the next major demonstration in March of that year, which finished with even more violent clashes with the police defending the embassy—and the giant demonstration that followed in October.

War Crimes Tribunal

Ernie became centrally involved in a linked major initiative, the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, which mobilized well-known figures to consider the evidence, of which there was ample quantities, of American war crimes in Vietnam. Ernie worked with Ralph Schoenman, Bertrand Russell’s key assistant, and his work on the Tribunal brought him into contact with such figures as Jean-Paul Sartre, French writer KS Karol, Simone de Beauvoir, Scottish miners leader Lawrence Daly and Isaac Deutscher, author of the majestic three-volume biography of Trotsky. Ernie got on well with Deutscher and visited his house several times. In turn Isaac Deutscher defended Ernie after he was beaten up selling pamphlets outside a rally of the Healyite Socialist Labour League (SLL) in Camden Town Hall. Deutscher stopped writing for the SLL’s Labour Review, which he had done under a pseudonym, and summoned the SLL leadership to his house for a dressing down.

Ernie was a member of the Fourth International’s executive committee, and frequently attended its meetings in Brussels; he and Jess went to the November 1967 meeting in Belgium.
preparing the upcoming West Berlin international conference and demonstration. They were astonished by the political sophistication and organizational capacities of the new generation of young revolutionaries. In later years Ernie, of course, located himself in the tradition of the Fourth International, but—in retrospect—was critical of what he thought in the 1960s and later was a huge over-estimation of the strength of “world revolution,” and what he thought was sometimes the use of Fourth International affiliation as an artificial barrier between revolutionaries.

Through the VSC, in 1968 and 1969 the IMG started to grow among students, especially after the coup of recruiting Tariq Ali, but also more generally, because of the impact of the French “events” of May 1968 and the intellectual prestige of Fourth International leader Ernest Mandel. But the personal financial situation of Jess and Ernie started to cause serious problems. They had important family commitments to meet, but were scraping by on a pittance, Ernie at the Toynbee Street center and Jess as distribution manager for the new left-wing paper Black Dwarf. Deciding that the situation was unsustainable, they decided to go back to Canada, where they could get well-paid jobs, meet their commitments and prepare for the future.

The early IMG, in which Ernie and Jess were key, had a profound impact in the future of the revolutionary left in Britain. It was boosted to a new level of influence through the VSC. There was a lot of building material lying around in the mid- and late 1960s, but it needed a framework, a national campaign, to sustain it. And the fact that the IMG played such a crucial role had a lasting impact, not only on the revolutionary left, but on the militant left in general.

There are things which are taken as socialist common sense here today—for example the importance of women’s oppression and the struggle against racism and for Black liberation—were pioneered by the IMG in the late 60s and early 70s; likewise the importance of international solidarity and anti-imperialism (the British left is today has numerous “solidarity” campaigns and committees.) These things weren’t at all common sense on much of the revolutionary left—the IMG had to fight for them. It was through comrades like Ernie that the far left was able to raise its sights to a new conception of internationalism, and a deeper understanding of gender and racial oppression.

**Return to Canada**

Back in Toronto, Ernie got a job with the electricity utility Toronto Hydro and Jess with phone company Bell Canada. Ernie was the long-term vice-president and leading steward of the union local and played a major role in the 1989 Toronto Hydro strike. But things became difficult for them in the League for Socialist Action (LA), the
FI’s Canadian section which was closely allied with the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP). There were differences with LSA leader Ross Dowson on a number of international issues, and Ernie was not given the full-time post he had been promised. By the end of the 1970s they felt that the organization, now renamed the Communist League under the influence of U.S. SWP leader Jack Barnes, was headed in an irreversible sectarian direction and they decided to leave. But Ernie and Jess never gave up politics. Outside of LSA Jess and Ernie were involved with a series of socialist initiatives and union activism, and later the Socialist Project regroupment in which Toronto-based writers like Leo Panitch, Sam Gindin and Greg Albo played an important role. They were also regular visitors to the annual U.S. “Marxism” conferences, and also came to conferences of Socialist Resistance and the Socialist Alliance in London and the Scottish Socialist Party in Glasgow.

I was able to reconnect with Ernie and Jess, for the first time in 31 years, when they came to London in 2000. With my partner Kathy Lowe, I was able to visit them in Toronto on two occasions subsequently, and they also entertained us at the cottage they had built on the Bruce Peninsula, on the shores of Lake Huron. As their contribution to defending the environment, they had bought 100 acres on the peninsula, which they were allowing to go back to nature. Deer and brown bears visited their back garden, and beavers returned to the lake on their property.

Jessie and Ernie after retirement were able to travel a lot, going south to escape the Toronto winters. They loved the London theatre and eating in good restaurants. Ernie was always a genial companion, as was Jess, full of amusing anecdotes and sparkling conversation. We met up with them on the Bruce a few days after 9/11 attacks. “This is going to have awful political consequences” I said. “And it’s terrible that so many people should lose their lives in that way” Ernie replied. That was Ernie all over, seeing the human tragedy as well as the analytical consequences.

Beginning in the early 1980s Ernie and Jess developed their knowledge of Latin American politics and culture during visits to Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, visits where they also pursued their new passion for bird watching. In 2018 they were very pleased to go back to Cuba to speak at a conference on the legacy of Trotsky.

In 2014 Resistance Books published Ernie’s two-volume book, *Revolutionary Activism in the 1950s and ’60s*, Volumes one and two, on revolutionary activism in Canada and Britain. The next year he spoke at a conference on 1960s politics at the University of East Anglia and at several other conferences and meetings on the same topic. The book is an invaluable historical record of the revolutionary left in that era and will be a political resource for years to come. As IMG old-timer Julian Atkinson says, “His memoirs are wonderfully balanced and objective. They rise above any trace of the factional.”

Ernie was pleased to be able to provide evidence for the Undercover Policing Enquiry about the infiltration of VSC from 1968. Unable to attend the event is person, his evidence was read into the record by a Queen’s Counsel (QC)1. Ernie used the enquiry as a platform to explain the role of the VSC and expose the state’s role in using infiltration to spy on, and destabilize, the campaign and the Left in general.

It is terribly hard to say goodbye to such a wonderful friend and comrade as Ernie, a real working class intellectual who combined amazing political and human qualities. It is of course a huge loss for Jess to whom we send our love and solidarity.

Volume 1 on Canada in the 1950s and ’60s can be ordered here: https://resistancebooks.org/product/57/

Volume 2 of Ernie Tate’s book on Revolutionary Activism in the 1960s in Britain can be ordered here: https://resistancebooks.org/product/54/

—Socialist Resistance, February 8, 2021
https://socialistresistance.org/a-tribute-to-ernie-tate/21613

1 In Canada, the honorary title of Queen’s Counsel, or QC, is used to recognize Canadian lawyers for exceptional merit and contribution to the legal profession.
https://www.thoughtco.com/queens-counsel-qc-510536

Continued from page 54

All 43 cases are reviewed, beginning with: “Cuban citizen, 75-years-old, from Alquízar, in Artemisa, already suffering from arterial hypertension and ischemic cardiopathy who is afebrile, on mechanical ventilation, is hemodynamically stable...with acceptable blood gases (oxygen and CO2), is improving radiologically with inflammatory lesions in the right [lung] base—reported as critical but stable.” The cases of four Cubans who died that day are also presented.

Fighting a pandemic in Cuba, it’s understood, is no casual matter. Nor is the health of Cuba’s people.

—CounterPunch, February 8, 2021
We’ve seen the DNA evidence in the Kevin Cooper case. It points elsewhere.

By Nicholas Kristof

When a neighbor arrived at the Ryen home on June 5, 1983, to pick up his son from a sleepover, he couldn’t process what he saw through the window. He thought all the red must be paint.

Doug and Peggy Ryen had both been stabbed to death. So had their ten-year-old daughter, Jessica, and the neighbor’s 11-year-old, Chris Hughes. The Ryens’ son, eight-year-old Josh, had been left for dead with his throat slashed but survived.

It was an unimaginable tragedy, and it has been followed by another unimaginable tragedy, one that has lasted almost 38 years: A man who is very likely innocent appears to have been framed for that crime and remains on death row today.

The horrifying murder of a beautiful white family in Chino Hills, Calif., created enormous public pressure on the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Office to solve the crime. Although Josh had indicated that the attack was committed by several white men, the sheriff announced just four days after the bodies were found that the sole suspect was Kevin Cooper, a young Black man with a long criminal record who had recently walked away from a suspect was Kevin Cooper, a young Black man with a long criminal record who had recently walked away from a minimum-security prison and then hid in an empty house near the Ryens’.

I have written about Cooper before, most notably an extensive investigative essay in May 2018 that led two governors, Jerry Brown (reluctantly) and Gavin Newsom (readily), to order comprehensive DNA testing in the case. The testing has finally been completed, and I’ve obtained the lab results. So here’s where we stand, and why Newsom should create a high-level panel to review the Cooper case and make a recommendation about possible clemency. It’s up to Newsom, who has imposed a moratorium on executions, to resolve what appears to be a horrendous injustice.

Sadly, a tan T-shirt believed to have been worn by one of the killers didn’t produce enough DNA to provide a profile. The DNA degraded over the decades while California authorities blocked the testing that Cooper had pleaded for, letting officials run out the clock. Likewise, hairs found clutched in the victims’ hands weren’t Cooper’s (no hairs from an African-American were found at the crime scene) but didn’t lead to a match with a suspect, either.

The most significant result was from an orange towel apparently taken by one of the murderers from the Ryens’ home, perhaps to wipe off sweat, and then discarded. It yielded a full DNA profile, and it’s not Cooper’s or any of the victims’—but it hasn’t been matched to anyone else. Match that DNA, and we may quickly solve these murders.

There was other progress while the DNA testing was underway. The pro bono legal team working for Cooper, led by Norman C. Hile from the Orrick law firm, has written to Newsom describing a witness willing to testify in court that a different longtime suspect in the case recounted, not long after the murders, how he had killed the Ryens and Chris Hughes.

Two other witnesses, also willing to testify in court, say in written statements that this same person bragged to them more recently about having murdered an entire family, saying, “We butchered all of them.”

This other suspect is a white man whom I’ll identify just by his first name, Lee, for he must be presumed innocent. Lee is a convicted murderer who had completed his sentence and been out of prison for less than a year when the Ryens were killed.

Lee came to the attention of the authorities during the investigation after his girlfriend, Diana Roper, fingered him as the killer: She reported that he had returned home late on the night of the killings wearing bloody coveralls, in a car that resembled the Ryens’ station wagon.

Roper turned Lee’s bloody coveralls over to the sheriff’s office—which eventually threw them away without testing them. By then, the sheriff’s office had arrested Cooper, and deputies didn’t want a complication.

The DNA on the orange towel is not Lee’s, and he has denied to me that he was involved in the Ryen murders. It’s important not to try to free one innocent man by rushing to judgment about another. Still, the DNA testing and these witnesses add to the evidence that Cooper is an innocent man on death row.

“The case gets stronger and stronger for innocence,” said Tom Parker, a former deputy head of the F.B.I.’s office in Los Angeles, who has worked without charge to investigate the Cooper case. He added that as a 30-year law enforcement veteran, he is sickened by what he sees as a pattern of racism and “institutional corruption” that led to the railroading of Cooper. “It cuts a hole in your gut, it does,” he said.

There is growing recognition in criminal justice circles that Kevin Cooper may be innocent. “The San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department framed him,” William A. Fletcher, a
distinguished federal appeals court judge, declared in a lecture. Four other federal circuit court judges joined in a remarkable 100-page dissent Fletcher wrote warning that California was preparing to execute an innocent man.

The deans of four law schools and a former president of the American Bar Association have expressed concerns about the case. An excellent book, “Scapegoat,” has been written about it, and a documentary is in the works. Kim Kardashian visited Cooper in 2019 and has embraced his cause.

D.A. resists investigating evidence

Yet Cooper remains in prison. That’s partly because the San Bernardino County District Attorney’s Office continues to resist an investigation into whether he is innocent, just as it previously resisted comprehensive DNA testing.

The D.A.’s office notes, for example, that Cooper’s blood was found on that tan T-shirt apparently worn by the murderer. That’s true: Testing years ago confirmed that it is Cooper’s blood—but also suggests that sheriff’s deputies spilled the blood on the shirt to frame him.

Deputies took a sample of Cooper’s blood after his arrest, using a chemical called EDTA to preserve it in the test tube. Cooper’s blood on that shirt had elevated EDTA in it; in other words, it seemed to have come not from his body directly, but from a test tube.

In addition, before the latest round of DNA testing, a vial of Cooper’s blood was found to be nearly empty, with just residue in the bottom.

“Based on my 25 years of experience with DNA testing, I can’t imagine any testing that would consume that much blood, even with multiple rounds of testing,” said Bicka Barlow, a DNA expert and lawyer who is consulting for Cooper’s side.

Relatives of the victims are convinced that Cooper is guilty, and San Bernardino authorities argue that there is plenty of forensic evidence against him—a bloodstain, shoe prints, cigarette butts, and so on. If you trust the sheriff’s office, it’s compelling. But significant questions have been raised about every element of this “evidence,” with indications that it was systematically planted to frame Cooper.

Could the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Office really have planted evidence, including placing Cooper’s blood on the tan T-shirt? We do know that the sheriff’s office had a history of going rogue. Floyd Tidwell, the sheriff, was himself later convicted of four felony counts for stealing 523 guns from the evidence room. Tidwell denied any wrongdoing in the Cooper case; he died last February. Also, one of the sheriff’s lab technicians on the case, William Baird, acknowledged to me that he had stolen heroin from the evidence room, but denied having framed Cooper.

The injustices may go well beyond Cooper. William Richards, prosecuted by the San Bernardino County authorities in the murder of his wife and sent to prison for life, was exonerated in 2016 after junk science on bite marks was discredited and after it was revealed that a longtime forensics expert in the sheriff’s office appeared to have planted evidence. This was the same expert who had “found” evidence against Cooper. At least eight other people now serving long prison sentences may also have been framed by the same person, according to Parker, the former F.B.I. official.

Making sense of this case

The biggest problem with the case against Kevin Cooper, though, is simply that it doesn’t make sense.

The prosecution theory that Cooper single-handedly invaded the Ryen home seems to me preposterous. The medical examiner concluded that at least three weapons—a hatchet, an ice pick and one or two knives—were used to stab the victims approximately 140 times, and the attacker(s) appear to have discarded tan and blue shirts worn in the attack.

So as he mounted this attack, Cooper was juggling three or four weapons? Pausing in midassault to change shirts? And how could a 155-pound man like Cooper enter the house, with the Ryens’ dogs presumably sounding an alarm, and then overpower both Doug Ryen, a former military policeman, and Peggy Ryen, strong and athletic—each of whom had a loaded gun by the side of the bed?

And even if all this somehow were possible, why would Cooper, when fleeing in the Ryens’ car, have left bloodstains on three seats and thrown the hatchet used in the attack out the passenger side window?

Yet California for almost 38 years has prepared to ignore all this and execute a Black man who is probably innocent. Democratic and Republican politicians alike have mostly averted their eyes, presumably in part for fear of offending voters who might be upset at the exoneration of a Black man convicted of a brutal crime against a white family.

So, after a year in which America has looked anew at racism in the criminal justice system, let’s be frank about race.

“If I was a white man, or if I was a wealthy Black man, I would not be in prison right now,” Cooper told me in a phone call from San Quentin. Of course, he’s right.

Yet fundamentally Cooper blames himself, for fleeing the minimum-security prison. “If I had not put myself in that position for those body snatchers to get their hands on me, I would not be here today,” he said. “I have to take responsibility for my actions.”

This is not a case just of police and prosecutorial misconduct. The entire system failed, decade after decade.

Conservative law enforcement officials in San Bernardino County blocked comprehensive DNA testing for years, but so did Democratic politicians like
Jerry Brown and Kamala Harris when they were attorneys general of California. The latest California attorney general, Xavier Becerra, a Democrat whom President Biden has named to his cabinet, also did not authorize testing.

Harris has told me she regrets her failure to allow testing. Cooper was asked by a Sean Hannity representative for an interview before the election, apparently in hopes that he would denounce her. Cooper refused.

“I got integrity,” he said. “I know those people don’t give a damn about me, don’t care about my situation.”

One challenge in cases like this is that the criminal justice system establishes considerable barriers to finding someone guilty in the first place, but then after conviction places significant impediments to free that person even when new information comes to light.

“The legal system is deeply, deeply committed to closure, finality, procedural exhaustion, and there are some good reasons for that,” Chesa Boudin, the San Francisco district attorney, told me. “But when it comes to executing a man or woman who may be innocent, there’s no excuse for closing the door because of procedural issues.”

Boudin has set up a six-member panel—with a retired judge, a forensics specialist and other experts—to review old cases in San Francisco about which doubts have arisen, and it’s a model for what the governor should create to review Cooper’s conviction in Southern California.

“We have to be equally committed to doing justice retrospectively as to do it prospectively,” Boudin told me. “Anybody who is fair-minded has to know that the situation is not perfect, that mistakes are made.”

While running for D.A., Boudin applied to visit Cooper in San Quentin but says he was denied permission by the California Department of Corrections.

Let me be honest: I don’t know for certain that Cooper is innocent. We all need a dose of humility about our capacity to discern the truth.

What is indisputable is not Cooper’s guilt or innocence, but doubt. When federal judges, law school deans and others believe that a man has been framed, and when another person is said to have privately confessed to the murders, how can we keep a man on death row because, well, it’s possible he’s guilty?

Now it’s time for Governor Newsom to order an investigation to review the Cooper case and examine whether an innocent man has been framed. We can’t undo the tragedy that unfolded 38 years ago in the Ryen home, but we can end another.


Kevin Cooper, an innocent man on death row. Illustration by Lizzie Gill; photograph by Associated Press
Free Ed Poindexter

Black Votes Matter asks Nebraska Pardon Board to release former Black Panther Ed Poindexter from prison after 51 years

By Michael Richardson

The campaign to obtain freedom for former Black Panther leader Edward Poindexter is gaining growing support as evidenced by a new billboard near Interstate 480 in Omaha, Nebraska, calling for his freedom. Poindexter has been imprisoned since 1970 for the bombing murder of an Omaha policeman following a controversial trial marred by withheld evidence, apparent planted evidence, conflicting police testimony, questionable forensic evidence, and perjured testimony by the state’s chief witness, Duane Peak, the confessed bomber.

Poindexter, sentenced to life at hard labor at the close of the April 1971 trial, has survived co-defendant David Rice (later Wopashitwe Mondo Eyen we Langa) who died at the maximum-security Nebraska State Penitentiary in March 2016 while serving his life sentence. The two prisoners were leaders of a Black Panther Party affiliate chapter called the National Committee to Combat Fascism and targets of a clandestine counterintelligence operation code-named COINTELPRO conducted illegally by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Preston Love, Jr. is a member of the Freedom for Ed Committee that has held a prayer vigil, a march, and a demonstration outside the home of Governor Pete Ricketts. Love, who chairs the organization Black Votes Matter, is firmly convinced Poindexter was a victim of a wrongful conviction. Over the years, Freedom of Information lawsuits have slowly uncovered secret federal manipulation of the murder investigation and subsequent criminal trial. However, despite the revelations, Poindexter has not been granted a new trial.

Many, including a national justice group, have called Poindexter a political prisoner because of the COINTELPRO subterfuge and subsequent unfair court-injustice that has kept him imprisoned for half a century. The funds for the billboard were provided in a grant from the Jericho Movement to Free All Political Prisoners. Jericho Boston helped defray the billboard costs.

Denied a new trial by the courts, Poindexter is getting similar treatment from the Nebraska Pardon Board, made up of the Governor, Attorney General, and Secretary of State. The three politicians control Poindexter’s fate as they determine sentence commutations. Until the trio acts, the Nebraska Parole Board cannot take up Poindexter’s case.

Not only has the Pardon Board thus far declined to consider Poindexter’ request for a commutation of sentence, they insist he must continue to wait for a hearing. Despite Poindexter’s age, 76, and ailing health, the Pardon Board refuses to hear his case while they work on pardons for persons no longer in jail.

In a stunning display of disregard for the numerous calls throughout the country to reduce prison populations as the COVID-19 virus runs rampant behind bars, the Nebraska Parole Board refuses to consider commutation requests ahead of pardons for those who have already served their sentence. The board has approximately fifty pending commutation requests yet only hears a half-dozen cases every several months. Instead, the majority of cases that appear before the board are for pardons from those who have already been released from the prison due to the risk of infection. The board also refuses to triage the commutation requests to put elderly or at-risk prisoners on an expedited schedule.

Ricketts and his two political colleagues have failed Good Government 101. The best place to start on any reduction of the number of confined inmates would be with those seeking commutation. Their cases are already prepared for consideration and would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Preston Love explains the reason for the billboard. “It is time for the public to realize that Ed Poindexter is real and is vulnerable to forces beyond his control, just like the rest of us. His humanity, his face, his life. We hope this billboard will close the gap for many to speak out for Ed and help get the State’s knee off his throat, let him breathe.”

More information on Ed Poindexter is available in the book FRAMED: J. Edgar Hoover, COINTELPRO & the Omaha Two story, in print edition at Amazon and in ebook format. Portions of the book may also be read free online at NorthOmahaHistory.com. The book is also available to patrons of the Omaha Public Library.

—Richardson Reports, February 5, 2021


Write to Ed Poindexter at:
Ed Poindexter #27767
Nebraska State Penitentiary
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, NE 68542-2500

Billboard in Omaha, Nebraska calling for release of former Black Panther leader Edward Poindexter, imprisoned since 1970 after a COINTELPRO-tainted trial for the murder of a policeman while the confessed killer never spent a day in prison. (credit: Lamar)
On January 4th of this year a British court headed by Judge Vanessa Baraitser was scheduled to rule on a U.S. request that Julian Assange be extradited to the United States to stand trial on espionage charges. The previous day, January 3rd, civil liberties activists held a rally at the British Consulate in New York City to demand that Britain deny the extradition request. My speech at that rally, reprinted below, expressed and elaborated on that demand.

Judge Baraitser was widely expected to approve the extradition request, but surprisingly, she did not. Her decision, however, explicitly upheld the U.S. charges against Assange, but blocked his extradition on humanitarian grounds—that the harsh prison conditions Assange would face in the United States would undermine his mental health and put him at risk of suicide. Assange’s lawyers and supporters applauded the decision as a victory for Assange, but one that nonetheless continued to imperil freedom of speech and investigative journalism.

On January 19th, the day before Trump was forced out of office, his Department of Justice filed an appeal to Judge Baraitser’s decision. The Brits were not concerned with what lame duck Trump wanted; they wanted to know what the President-elect wanted. Biden was thus faced with a decision. He could ignore the last-minute Trump administration action, putting an end to the affair, or he could order the Department Of Justice to refile the appeal and continue to pursue Assange’s extradition. The deadline for refiling the appeal was Friday, February 12th.

On the first day of the deadline week—Monday, February 8th—a coalition of twenty-four leading civil liberties organizations issued a powerful call to the new administration to drop the Assange prosecution altogether. The ACLU, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Press Freedom Defense Fund, Reporters Without Borders, and the Knight First Amendment Institute were among the signatories. As a spokesman for the Press Freedom Defense Fund explained:

“Former President Obama came into office promising the ‘most transparent administration in history,’ but its use of the Espionage Act against journalistic sources left a dark stain on its press freedom legacy. Biden has come into office with similarly lofty rhetoric about the importance of press freedom and the role of journalists. The continuing Assange prosecution is perhaps the first major test of those ideals, and his Department of Justice should act accordingly.”

But the following day—February 9th—a spokesman for the Biden administration unofficially announced that the Department of Justice intended to continue seeking Assange’s extradition. That they hadn’t yet officially filed the appeal gave a little room for Assange’s lawyers and supporters to hope that they might not actually do so. Wednesday came and went, and the DOJ remained silent. On Thursday, still not a peep from the DOJ. But on Friday, the other shoe finally dropped. Like their Trumpist predecessors, they waited until the last possible day to do their nefarious deed.

Tomorrow a judge at the Old Bailey in London is expected to rule on whether Julian Assange will be extradited to the United States to face espionage charges that carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison.

I’m here now to join with others—those here today and defenders of human rights around the world—the ACLU, Amnesty International, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, and many others—to demand that the British government refuse to extradite Julian Assange, and to set him free immediately and unconditionally.
We also call on the American government to drop all of the false and malicious charges they’ve brought against him, and cease all threats of prosecution in the United States. We call for the release of Julian Assange first and foremost on the grounds that his imprisonment is an egregious injustice. We secondarily call for his release on humanitarian grounds, because the abuse and mistreatment he has already suffered in Belmarsh Prison constitutes an ongoing crime against humanity.

To those who are hoping that the incoming Biden administration may be inclined toward looking favorably on Assange’s case, I cite a reminder recently published in The Intercept:

“. . . the Obama-Biden administration was one of the most hostile toward whistleblowers and journalists that we’ve ever seen—and far more effective at suppressing dissent than Donald Trump’s buffoonery. There’s no reason to think that President Biden will be any different.”

It was the Obama-Biden administration, after all, that originally charged Assange with espionage in 2010. On the other hand, it withdrew those charges in 2013, when it realized that it simply didn’t have a case against Assange and WikiLeaks that couldn’t also be made against the New York Times and many other mainstream media outlets in the United States.

That is the precedent Biden should follow. On January 20th, one of his first official acts as President should be to withdraw the application to extradite Julian Assange from Britain to the United States. And if Biden doesn’t do that, we have to make sure he’s held accountable.

We make the demands to free and to cease the mistreatment of Julian Assange not only because we oppose the violation of a single individual’s human rights, but because we also recognize the truth of the fundamental principle of labor solidarity—that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” As long as Julian Assange is unfree, our fundamental democratic rights are under assault, and to the extent we are denied our democratic rights, we are also unfree.

As for “espionage,” if Assange revealed American diplomatic or military secrets, or secrets of any kind—that was not espionage—it was journalism. The information he published was vital to the public interest, as hundreds of investigative journalists, legal experts, and human rights advocates have declared.

What Julian Assange and WikiLeaks published allowed citizens of countries all over the world to be aware of their governments’ activities. That has long been recognized as the legitimate and necessary function of a free press. The attacks against Assange are attacks on our democratic and Constitutional right to freedom of the press. And that’s why we’re here demanding his freedom.

Finally, I say to those of you here today: We can hope that tomorrow the British government will rule against Julian Assange’s extradition. On the other hand, if their order goes the other way, he is unlikely to be extradited any time soon, because his lawyers will be able to appeal the ruling. That would result in his continued incarceration and mistreatment in Belmarsh Prison.

So, whichever way the ruling goes, we have to be prepared to intensify our efforts. A primary focus will have to be to continue to counter the widespread campaign of slander and vilification that has poisoned the American national conversation and prejudiced many of our compatriots against Assange. That’s the task we’re faced with, and it’s going to be an uphill battle. But the stakes are enormous, both for Julian Assange, and for ourselves.

No Extradition!
End all prosecution and persecution!
Free Julian Assange!

Cliff Conner is author of A People’s History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and Low Mechanics and The Tragedy of American Science From Truman to Trump, among other books and writings.

1 Quote from a fundraising plea sent out by The Intercept on December 24, 2020.
Weighing me down

Indiana officials know they are literally starving prisoners in the solitary confinement unit here at Wabash Valley Correctional (sic) Facility (WVCF), aka the SHU.

I knew something was amiss when I was transferred here on September 3, 2020, and during the intake process was weighed on a scale that under-weighed me by 63 pounds.

I pointed out to the nurse that I obviously didn’t weigh 187 pounds and had actually just been weighed at 250 pounds several times before leaving the prior prison.

She tried to convince me the scale was accurate.

I immediately grieved the matter, pointing out that I had been deliberately under-weighed because of the starvation portions served in the SHU. Their game was to have a low intake weight on record so if the prisoner were to later complain of hunger and weight loss, a subsequent weight check would show a gain in weight, even if he’d actually lost a substantial amount.

I was reweighed on October 8th and weighed 234 pounds, having lost 16 pounds in a month.

When the grievance came back on November 2nd, the Medical Administrator replied that she’d have me reweighed and compare it to my intake weight, as if I hadn’t already been reweighed on October 8th. I appealed her response stating that I was already reweighed at 234 pounds, showing a loss of 16 pounds.

The appeal came back with the same response that I was to be reweighed and it would be compared to my intake weight. They never did the second reweighing, and I don’t believe the 234 pounds was recorded on October 8th.

Hunger pain

Often when we’re on the phone, my partner hears and comments on me crunching on cough drops, which I and many prisoners here eat like food because we remain so hungry and they are the only ingestibles we are allowed to purchase from the commissary on disciplinary segregation.

As the courts have recognized, the constant dull pain of hunger due to inadequate food constitutes torture.

To make matters worse, on December 8th WVCF warden Frank Vanihel allowed the food service contractor Aramark to begin serving us sack meals in place of dinner trays. The sack meal contains two sandwiches (consisting of peanut butter and jelly, and a thin slice of lunch meat) and four duplex cookies; a tiny meal of almost nothing but carbohydrates—no fruits or vegetables are served which we would receive if given the trays prescribed on the menus.

We’re literally starving.

Actually, most of our meals consist of primarily carbohydrates. Today, for example, breakfast consisted of a tiny serving of generic corn flakes, a couple of spoonfuls of instant potatoes, two slices of bread, and butter. Lunch consisted of spaghetti with a meatball-sized portion of meat crumbled up in the noodles, two slices of bread, a tiny serving of peas, and a small piece of plain cake. Dinner, as said, was two sandwiches and cookies.

So, the only food items we received for the entire day that weren’t carbs were the tiny portions of crumbled up meat, peas, and a slice of lunch meat. We didn’t even receive a piece of fruit the entire day.

These portions and lack of variety grossly violate the basic daily require-
ments of the FDA’s food pyramid and clearly don’t meet the 2500 daily calorie intake requirements for moderately active adults.

**Softening us up for COVID**

The prison has been on lockdown since mid-November because of a recent spike in local COVID-19 cases, including inside the prison.

A strong immune system that requires a healthy diet is the best natural defense against infection and the worst effects of the virus. Yet we’re being served foods that are lacking in even basic nutrition and that will make our immune systems especially weak and vulnerable.

It’s generally known that people with preexisting health conditions like diabetes are the most vulnerable to infection and death from COVID. This is because spikes in blood sugar levels weaken the immune system.

So why would these prison officials alter our diet at just the moment of spikes in COVID infections, so that we receive almost no nutrients and primarily carbohydrates, which cause chronic diabetic-type blood sugar spikes in non-diabetic people?

On top of our needing to receive filling food portions as a general matter, we need attention drawn to the denial of healthy meals especially during this pandemic, and our right to purchase foods from the prison commissary in disciplinary segregation.

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**LETTER TO THE EDITORS**

Dear Editors,

This is what a real American looks like, these days. It’s like growing up in a dysfunctional home thinking is normal and naturally loving it.

As a real American I can admit the truth and say we have to do better. The history of the United States has put this country in the position of the villain to the people whose labor created the original American surplus wealth. It’s time we see some accountability and reparations.

In American people I see the resilience of the human spirit. I see a nation of beautiful diversity yet lacking necessary equality. When people realize, and it happens from time-to-time, that we have more in common than we are different, the differences are celebrated, and an abundance is produced. That’s how humanity can lead into the future instead of fighting and flailing through time.

The United States fights with the threat of enormous weapons to be the so-called leaders of the world. We can become true leaders. Leaders put people’s well-being of above the private hordes of profit. The world already has enough accumulated wealth to afford to structure the economy to benefit the public’s well-being over the private profit motive. I stand with people and for any cause truly for people. I can say this, I’m making ends meet, barely because unemployment is not enough. I got laid off twice since the pandemic started, worked myself out of a job. I’m a working person, not very skilled at the “slow-down” side of things, because construction, espe-

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Write to Kevin “Rashid” Johnson:

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6908 S. Old U.S. HWY 41, P.O. Box 500
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Photo: Johnny Gould
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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, racism, sexism 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.
Fighting to Win

EDITORIAL BY CAROLE SELIGMAN

This speech was delivered to the January 26th Rally Against Racism, Fascism and for a General Strike in San Francisco.

President Biden’s inaugural address was focused on unity—but the unity he espoused is the big lie that American politics is based on—that there can be unity of the oppressed and the oppressor; the exploited and the exploiter; former slaves and former slave owners; immigrants and refugees and the border patrol; the poor and the wealthy; the working class and the owners.

There is no fruitful unity between the main opposing groups of our society—the working class and the ruling class.

But there is a true unity that we must have, a unity in resistance, a unity of the working class, the masses of people of this country—Black, white, Brown, Asian—based on the struggle for our basic needs.

Working people must unify independently to fight for these things:

1. Demand all the means to end the global pandemic, now. Take profit completely out of the COVID-19 picture and implement a massive public health program to vaccinate the population.
2. End all evictions and foreclosures on housing. Make housing a human right, with rent tied to income with no rent surpassing ten percent of income. Forgive rents and mortgage payments during the pandemic. Make the banks pay. Crash program to build housing and end homelessness.
3. Food is a human right. Federal financing to provide food for all.
4. Massive program of green jobs to repair the planet and build infrastructure—housing, schools, mass transit; socialized medicine, including mental healthcare for all.
5. Abolish the death penalty and life sentences without parole; vaccinate and clear the prisons of all non-violent prisoners.

All of these things can be accomplished by ending the nuclear weapons program, the military bases and occupations in foreign countries, the production of weapons, the trillions in military expenditures.

These are the things we need, but in order to fight for them and against the fascist danger growing in this country, we must disabuse ourselves of the idea that there could be unity with the Democratic Party, which (as much as the Republicans,) represents the ruling class, and the state of armed people—the cops and all branches of the military. Working people need our own organizations independent of the capitalists.

Watch out for the union leaders and non-profit organizations who have aligned with the Democratic Party. They proved themselves corrupt by approving and even surpassing Trump’s last military budget! They have run departments of murderous police who kill Black people and go unpunished. Kamala Harris refused to order DNA testing for innocent death row prisoner Kevin Cooper which caused him to spend several more years in prison where he still languishes—so much for progressive Democrats.

NO, working people need our own unity—of, by, and for the working class. That is how we will fight fascism and win!
Attention Prison Mail Room:

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 s/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.”