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SocialistViewpoint

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

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2017 VOL. 17 NO. 5



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Charlottesville

A gun in his face, but he got the photo

BY GREG PALAST

Don't look away. Four white neo-Nazis are beating a Black man, crawling on the ground, with their metal poles and a yellow hunk of lumber. The beating continues—there's blood on the pavement.

Our photographer, Zach D. Roberts, continues to shoot—even as a white militant raises a 9mm pistol to his face.

Zach got a shot of the gun and gunman, too. Luckily, the gunman didn't shoot back.

One photo has gone viral internationally. These others we bring you here because they must be seen. Including, for the first time, the gunman.

Welcome to Charlottesville, USA. Trump's America, month eight.

The young victim is De'Andre Harris, a special education teacher in Charlottesville.

According to the President, the violence was perpetrated on "many sides." The only sides I see are the beaters and the beaten; De'Andre on the ground with the alt-Right storm troopers with weapons.

Zach D. Roberts is an investigative photojournalist who has been with the Palast Investigations team for eleven years.

Here is Zach's report:

"De'Andre Harris, the school teacher, was walking down the street

with friends, trading taunts with the white supremacist demonstrators.

"Harris' jibes were hardly fighting words. 'Go home! Leave town!' Locals like Harris resented the jackass invasion.

"That's when fists flew and Harris was slammed by one of the white guys straight into a parking lot barrier so hard the yellow wooden arm broke.

"De'Andre fell to the ground, alone, surrounded by all these white guys—and they started beating him with the poles that almost all the white supremacists were carrying."

In the photos, you can see one white guy picking up the yellow barrier arm and raising the three foot hunk of lumber high over his head before he brings it down on De'Andre—who is being kicked by another white man's boots while two others bring down metal rods on the prone man.

And no, that's not a cop on the left in the photo—that's a neo-Nazi in full riot gear. (Where were the cops? Good question: this parking garage is next to the Charlottesville Police Station.)

De'Andre was saved when some gutsy young Black men—with no weapons—ran into the underground garage, which prompted the white posse to scatter.

Except for one. The gunman.

He pulled out what looks to be a 9mm pistol, maybe a Glock semi-automatic, and positioned himself to fire on the rescue squad. But then he heard the click of Zach's camera, just three feet away, and realized he was getting photographed.

Simultaneously, Zach realized he'd left his bulletproof vest in his car. (I'll have that discussion with him later.)

In this strange standoff, the camera proved mightier than the bullet. In his tiny little brain, the would-be shooter figured it would be wiser to quickly conceal the weapon and flee.

De'Andre "ran into the garage's staircase and collapsed bleeding profusely from the face." Zach waited with him and his protectors for half an hour but no ambulance arrived for him or the other people who were injured.

So, that's the news from Trump's USA. Nazis marching in the street, nuclear war with Korea, the "military option" for Venezuela. And it's only Monday.

I was going to write about Korea, then Venezuela, but then the Armed Alt-Righteous exposed themselves to Zach's lens.

The Virginia story is not over. We will be going back to Virginia on September 9, to the capital, Richmond, to fight for the right for Black folk to arm themselves with the one weapon these white punks fear most: the vote.

Between snapping photos of America gone mad, Zach has been working these past four years with me on a story of how Trump's henchman, one Kris Kobach, now head of Trump's so-called, "Election Integrity Commission," conceived of a secretive program to remove hundreds-of-thousands of Black Americans from the voter rolls.

Continued on pag54



Here, in a car garage in Charlottesville near the recent Unite the Right rally there, a bunch of fascists explain their view of white supremacy to a Black man. This is the true meaning of "free speech" for fascists. Any questions? (photo from gregpalast.com)

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Editorial Introduction

In this issue of *Socialist Viewpoint* we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the October 1917 Russian Revolution. We are featuring historical articles outlining the profound victories and failures of the first workers' state based upon the ideas of Marxism and the vision of a socialist world free of war, wage-slavery, oppression, and starvation—a world where the full development of each is the condition for the full development of all. The momentous events that took place in Russia beginning in 1917 can be seen as an outline of what was successful and what failed on the road to a socialist world.

The context of today in the USA

Only 55.4 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots in 2016—26.5 percent for Clinton and less, for Trump—with Trump getting 304 votes in the Electoral College, which resulted in his victory.

Neither candidate nor their capitalist parties represent the people—the working class. In fact, the presidential

election represents the complete inability of the U.S. capitalist class to even address the dire needs of working people in this country. Living conditions are deteriorating on par with the deterioration of our environment. Capitalism can offer only war and conquest on behalf of the ruling rich, at the expense of everyone else and the planet.

In the face of an extreme housing shortage, a crumbling infrastructure, unemployment, and massive incarceration, the U.S. "...House and Senate Armed Services Committees are planning to propose a defense budget of \$640 billion for 2018, a \$37 billion increase over the Trump administration's \$603 billion request...along with a \$65 billion war budget."¹ Trump wants to bolster America's military with an amount not far short of Russia's entire 2016 defense budget of \$65.8 billion...."²

Clearly, the system of capitalism with the U.S. capitalist class at its helm, is incapable of improving life on Earth and, on the contrary, can only

offer the most powerful destructive forces. We are in the throes of capitalism's death agony.

The task of the working class is to take the power away from the capitalists and rule society in its own name and interests. On the way to this goal we must study history to find out what went wrong with the only democratic working-class revolution in the world and how to apply those lessons to our current struggle of survival against capitalism.

The goal of socialism is to put an end to war, conquest, and imperialist domination paid for by the sweat and blood of wage-slavery. The wholly undemocratic system of capitalism only works in the interests of the capitalist class and is diametrically opposed to the interests of the vast majority of humanity and the health of the planet.

The massive outpouring of people against bigotry, hate, war and mass incarceration is a step in the direction of a peaceful world whose minimal requirement is to bring equality and justice to all, and a permanent end to war and environmental destruction.

We will be continuing this discussion of the 100th anniversary of the 1917 Russian revolution in coming issues.

1 "Congress proposes defense budget \$37 billion higher than Trump's," by Jeremy Herb

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/22/politics/congress-trump-defense-budget/index.html>

2 "Trump's proposed increase in U.S. military spending is almost as big as Russia's entire defense budget," by Max de Haldevang

<https://qz.com/935663/trumps-increase-in-us-military-spending-is-almost-as-big-as-russias-entire-defense-budget/>



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Fascists Defeated

Left overtakes the fascists and their fronts in San Francisco and Berkeley

By CHRIS KINDER

August 27, 2017—Anti-fascist demonstrators in huge numbers overwhelmed the conservative, Christian-prayer and pro-Trump cover operations for the alt-right/white-supremacist/fascist mobilizations scheduled for the San Francisco Bay Area yesterday and today. Media outlets tilted their coverage of these events against the left, blaming black bloc and others for what little violence there was. But the huge numbers of counter-demonstrators sent the needed message: fascism must be crushed and not allowed to grow into a new level of threat against immigrants, Black and Brown people, other minorities and the working class generally.

In San Francisco on Saturday the 26th, the reactionaries' cover group—"Patriot Prayer"—chickened out at the last minute from their plan to assemble at Crissy Field, and planned instead to have a "press conference" (with the same speakers!) in a smaller park nearby. But that plan was swamped by thousands of counter protesters, while the fenced-off park was left empty. A tiny handful of these rightist creeps were left to wander around town, and out of town, to no avail.

Mass mobilization is what dissuaded these fascist enablers from going forward, and that included a resolution by the ILWU longshore workers Local 10 to shut down the port that day and march to Crissy Field to show the resolve of the anti-racist working class to oppose fascism. This resolution to shut down the port in protest of a racist event, on the part of a union, which has opposed apartheid in South Africa, the police murder of Oscar Grant, and the imprisonment of innocent former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal with similar actions, gave a big boost to the anti-fascist mobilization. The fact that this workers' action turned out not to be neces-

sary—due to the event's cancellation—is a credit to all those who came out. The message received from the ILWU was "we're there when you need us."

In Berkeley, where we were today, the "hundreds" or "thousands" of counter-demonstrators to the "No Marxism In America" rightist rally—as it was reported in the media—could easily have been 10,000 or more. They filled the streets for many blocks around the downtown area, and soon took over MLK Jr. Park, where the rightists' rally was to have been held. Their numbers included many individuals and organizations, perhaps as many as 100 organizations. Some arguments and fights occurred between anti-fascist demonstrators and the handful of rightists who showed up, allegedly to defend their "free speech." And herein lies a problem to be addressed.

Rightists were shown the door

The rightists who showed up and who were shown the door—chased out of the park and in one case beaten to the ground—mostly portrayed themselves as "Trump supporters." And the media—as in *NBC Local Bay Area* (www.nbcbayarea.com), and *SFGate* (www.sfgate.com)—both underestimated the size of the protestors' demonstration in my opinion; and also blamed the leftists for restricting the "free speech" of these rightists, and for causing the violence. *NBC* blamed the leftists—black bloc included—for "assaulting" "at least three people." *KPFA News*, however, reported that at least one of these so-called Trump supporters had on an Islamophobic T-shirt. This "Trump supporter" reportedly said to his leftist opponent in argument, "When is the last time you saw a lynching?" And his opponent said, "What about Charlottesville?" (*KPFA.org*)

In Charlottesville, a "Unite the Right" rally claimed free speech rights as well. They did this as a Black man was beaten nearly to death by a pack of Nazis in a local garage near the rally; and a protestor, Heather Heyer, was killed by a Hitler-lover participant of the rally who drove his car into a crowd of protestors, also wounding many others!

We won't forget Babi Yar!

One sign seen among the marchers in Berkeley today, hand written and barely legible from a distance, referred to some deep background about Nazis that must never be forgotten. It spoke of a person's grandparent who had been killed by German Nazis at Babi Yar in Ukraine when they invaded that country (then part of the USSR) in 1941. Their plan was to kill all the Jews, along with others, and enslave the rest of the population. Nearly 34,000 Jews were shot down and dumped into the ravine at Babi Yar on that day, September 19, 1941.

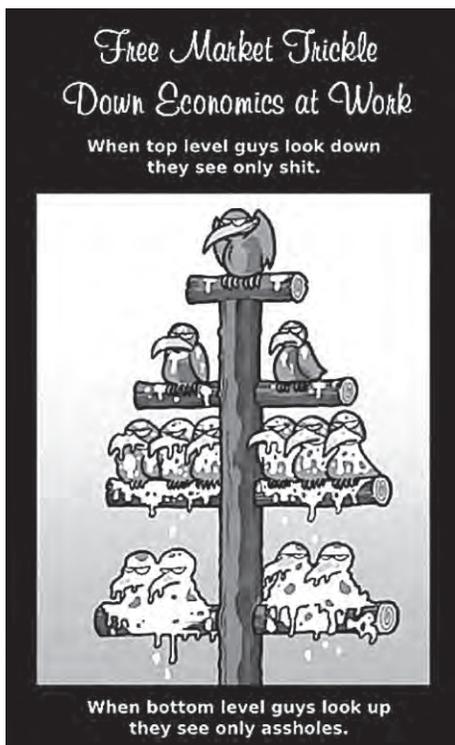
And this is not some irrelevant story that you can dismiss as ancient history! The local Ukrainian Nazi organizations that aided the Germans that day still exist; and they were key players in the U.S.-orchestrated *coup* in Ukraine in 2014, which was a major anti-Russian aggressive move. (Ukraine has never conducted any war crimes investigations against its Nazi sympathizers!) And now Trump, the idiot-in-chief of American imperialism, has (whether intentionally or not) unleashed the rotting corpses of Nazism and KKK in the U.S., like so many living dead. Their threat against minorities and all working people digs up the pogroms, Babi Yar, the Holocaust, and the brutal lynchings over many decades in the U.S., the nooses of which still swing sometimes today (including in the port of

Oakland!) Their threat to humanity remains alive.

Support free speech, but not for fascists

Free speech is important, and the left must oppose all official state legal controls on speech, whether of the left or right. And while free speech should be extended to non-fascist speakers that some of us on the left may disagree with (such as Richard Dawkins, for instance), the left should not extend this to actual fascists, or to groups which cover for them, like the Alt-Right, or these “Christians” or “Anti-Marxists” in San Francisco and Berkeley this weekend. For these people, “free speech” means let us continue the KKK-enforced racism of the South after Reconstruction, the murderous thuggery of the Greensboro Massacre of 1979, and Charlottesville today.

So what about it? “Free speech” for these groups and their alleged “Trump supporters” who, in the wake of Charlottesville, wanted to repeat the same thing in the Bay Area? I don’t think so. Today, the left did its job pretty well.



Russia 1917

How the revolution we need today prevailed then

By CHRIS KINDER

Long disparaged and denounced as it is, the Russian Revolution of 1917 still demands our attention today. No event in history was quite like the Russian Revolution, because no other event before or since has attempted to change the motive force of history in the fundamental way that this event did. By forming the world’s first and only lasting (if only for a few years) workers’ state, this revolution alone offered the promise of a world without the endless class conflict that defined all previous history: a world based on genuine human cooperation; free of exploitation, war, racism, sexism and national, ethnic and religious oppression. The promise of the Russian Revolution embodied the true goals of the vast majority of humanity then, and yes, of humanity today. The fact that this revolution soon was unraveled, betrayed and eventually destroyed only makes the lessons it holds for us today more important to understand.

Like the Paris Commune before it, the Russian Revolution established the dictatorship of the proletariat as the path to the eventual elimination of class-based society. But unlike the Commune, this revolution carved its way to power not by trying to take over the institutions of the bourgeois state, but by an uncompromising insistence that the working class take the power in its own name. Yet, that is not quite how it all began.

In February of 1917, a mass popular outpouring of women and men workers in Petrograd, exhausted, starved and fed up with the war, and soon joined by rank and file soldiers, toppled the brittle and inept Tsarist regime within a few days of strikes and street demonstrations. Workers councils (soviets) were immediately formed, but

their reformist leadership turned state power over to a bourgeois Provisional Government which sought to keep the capitalists and landowners in power, and to continue Russia’s involvement in the world war, to which their class was committed by finance and treaty.

The masses had demanded more

The masses in the streets—workers who had been peasants, and soldiers who were peasants in uniform—had demanded much more. The women who led it off on International Women’s Day shouted calls for “bread” to address the chronic shortages of food for Petrograd’s workers, and shouts of “down with the war” were soon everywhere in the streets. With the Tsar gone days later (after 300 years of autocracy, his own generals told him his time was up), soldiers established committees which proclaimed equality and terminated both the rule of officers and the death penalty in the military. Desertions from the trenches of the war with Germany, already high, increased dramatically.

Workers demanded higher wages and workers’ control of production. Peasants in the countryside began to burn the mansions of the landlords and seize the land. In short, the working people were putting forward their own demands, for peace, land and bread: demands, which the bourgeoisie could not and would not accede to. It was a stand off, known as “dual power:” the soviets had the masses, but the bourgeoisie, though weakened, still held the reins of power.

The permanent revolution

In 2017—the centennial year of the Russian Revolution—plagued as it is with a degenerate but still dominant imperialist power in the throes of

decline, and a world which seems embroiled in a Hobbesian nightmare¹ of endless war, it is important to understand how the stand-off in Russia's February evolved into a revolution, known as the October Revolution, which established a workers' state in Russia. The question of leadership was key, but more than that, what were the principles upon which leadership operated to pull the masses together into a struggle to put them in power? Here we need to look first of all at the theory of permanent revolution.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, under Lenin and Trotsky's leadership, was nothing if not a confirmation of this theory. The "permanent revolution" is a Marxist concept, which is just as vital today as it was in 1917. Permanent revolution refers to the proposition that in the modern world—that is, since the abolition of feudalism in Europe—the bourgeoisie is incapable of achieving even the most basic demands of a democratic revolution. The lessons of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, as Marx and Engels made clear in their "Address of the Central Committee To the Communist League" in 1850, were that the bourgeoisie, now empowered after the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, had become a brake on any further revolution in order to prevent the working-class masses from becoming a threat to their property.

In the failed revolutions of 1848-49, the bourgeoisie had allied with its fellow propertied class, the aristocratic landowners and other hangovers from feudalism, in order to prevent any concessions to the working masses. They wanted to stop the revolution at their "stage," *i.e.*, with the bourgeoisie in power, regardless of the anti-democratic compromises that required. What Marx and Engels so brilliantly concluded, is that the working-class would not only have to complete the bourgeois revolution, but also needed to struggle independently to achieve its own socialist and internationalist goals:

"While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible, and with the achievement, at most, of the above demands [final abolition of feudalism and of laws against usury, 'democratic' governmental forms, *etc.*,] it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been forced out of their position of dominance, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of proletarians, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians. For us the issue cannot be the alteration of private property but only its annihilation, not the smoothing over of class antagonisms but the abolition of classes, not the improvement of existing society but the foundation of a new one."²

Two years later, Marx detailed how the interests of the peasantry had radically changed since the Revolution of 1789 in France. Peasants had allied with the bourgeoisie in 1789; and following the destruction of the feudal nobility, which had held them as serfs, they had become small holders of agricultural plots. But now, they were the victims of the mortgages and taxes imposed on them by the new bourgeois ruling class. Agricultural production was down, and the peasants were immiserated, including "five million who hover on the margin of existence and either have their haunts in the countryside or...continually desert the countryside for the towns...."

"Therefore" Marx went on, "the interests of the peasants are no longer, as under Napoleon, in accord with, but are now in opposition to bourgeois interests, to capital. Hence they find their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task it is to overthrow the bourgeois order."³

Russian Marxists were divided into three camps

There could hardly have been a better description of the situation, and the revolutionary tasks, in Russia prior to the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. But Russian Marxists were divided in their analysis into roughly three camps. The Menshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) pointed to Russia's backwardness to insist that the working class could only be an appendage to the bourgeoisie, which must lead the revolution to establish capitalism, which must develop before the workers could advance to socialism. "Always and everywhere," said Trotsky in 1919, "the Mensheviks strove to find signs of the development of bourgeois democracy, and where they could not find them they invented them." (*Results and Prospects* 1906—see footnote 5)

Lenin's Bolsheviks, on the other hand, while accepting that a capitalist democratic republic was a necessary stage of the revolution, had absolutely no confidence in the ability of the bourgeoisie to overthrow Tsarism and carry out its own revolution. Lenin's formula for the revolution was that the working class must make the revolution and establish a "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" (DDPP), which alone, through workers and peasants sharing power together, could bring about bourgeois democratic revolution.

Lenin also foresaw something more, which gives a hint at least, that he understood the inherent contradiction of the DDPP, in which two classes with two separate interests could hold power together. "Its future [that is, the future of the DDPP] is the struggle against private property, the struggle of the wage worker against the employer, the struggle for socialism," Lenin explained. Even under a democratic republic established by the DDPP, "A Social-Democrat must never for a moment forget that the proletariat will inevita-

bly have to wage a class struggle for socialism even against the most democratic and republican bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie.... Hence, the absolute necessity of a separate, independent, strictly class party of Social-Democracy.”⁴

This last point—the need for a coherent revolutionary party—had been at the core of the 1903 split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and was to underlie all their growing differences. And it was to be a decisive feature of the Revolution of 1917.

The third vision of the coming revolution was that of Leon Trotsky. Trotsky, who after the 1903 split briefly went with the Mensheviks, then became independent, and finally joined Lenin in the Revolution of 1917, made the most coherent class analysis. In several works written around the time of the first (1905) revolution (in which he played a leading role as head of the Petrograd Soviet), he laid out his concept of the revolution in permanence in Russia. Having the most concentrated industry, and with the largest factories in Europe, combined with the most backward agricultural situation, Russia was saddled with a tsarist aristocratic state which rested on a powerful landed gentry born of another era. The capitalist enterprises, heavily invested in by foreign (principally French) capital, were fully intertwined with the landed aristocracy through financial arrangements. The capitalist class had been established within, was integral to, and was supportive of the gentry-dominated state. This “uneven and combined development”—modern capitalist industry imbedded within a dominant agricultural/aristocratic state just advanced from feudalism by inches—meant not only that the working class would have to make the bourgeois democratic revolution, as Lenin insisted, but that it would have to immediately press forward with its socialist, working-class demands.

Trotsky: permanent revolution

The standpoint that Trotsky and his co-thinker Parvus supported in 1904-05 was that, “... the revolution, having begun as a bourgeois revolution as regards its first tasks, will soon call forth powerful class conflicts and will gain final victory only by transferring power to the only class capable of standing at the head of the oppressed masses, namely to the proletariat. Once in power, the proletariat not only will not want, but will not be able to limit itself to a bourgeois democratic program.... It must adopt the tactics of permanent revolution, *i.e.*, must destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum program of the Social Democracy, go over to more and more radical social reforms and seek direct and immediate support in revolution in Western Europe.”⁵

Trotsky rejected Lenin’s slogan of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry because it was embroiled in class contradictions. The peasantry, while it had sometimes managed to overthrow governments in Europe, had never been able to establish its own state power, largely due to the “unceasing class differentiation among the peasantry,” namely the inevitable conflicts between the richest peasants (kulaks, in Russia), middle peasants and landless peasants, who were agricultural laborers on other peasants’ farms. Either a new landed aristocracy (as in the endless imperial overturns in China, for example), or an urban class had always inherited the power after peasant revolts.

Furthermore, a two-class state would be rife with contradictions and could not survive. The peasantry must either give way to petty-bourgeois democrats, *i.e.*, a new capitalist regime, or follow the lead of the proletariat, which, Trotsky said, “will bring all forces into play in order to raise the cultural level of the countryside and develop the political consciousness of the peasantry.” He goes on, “From what we have said

above, it will be clear how we regard the idea of a ‘proletarian and peasant dictatorship.’ It is not really a matter of whether we regard it as inadmissible in principle, whether ‘we do or do not desire’ such a form of political co-operation. We simply think that it is unrealizable...” And if taking the lead in the coming revolution did not mean that “the advanced workers should magnanimously shed their blood without asking themselves for what purpose, but means that the workers must take political leadership of the whole struggle, which above all will be a proletarian struggle, then it is clear that victory in this struggle must transfer power to the class that has led the struggle, *i.e.*, the Social Democratic proletariat.”⁶

The final split, and the war

Following the decisive split with the Mensheviks, which had happened in 1912; and with the experience of the inter-imperialist war then raging in Europe, by January of 1917 Lenin had come to a position on the revolution in Russia similar to Trotsky’s. Emphasizing that the coming Russian revolution would be a prologue to working-class revolution in Europe, Lenin said that “Undoubtedly, this coming revolution can only be a proletarian revolution, and in an even more profound sense of the word: a proletarian, socialist revolution also in its content.”⁷

Lenin was in exile in Zurich at this time, but as soon as he received word of the February Revolution and the setting up of a Provisional Government, he set about expounding his views. Noting that the workers of Petrograd were responsible for making the revolution happen, and had immediately established soviets as they had in 1905, Lenin said that, “...the new government that has seized power in St. Petersburg, or more correctly, wrested it from the proletariat, which has waged a victorious, heroic and fierce struggle, consists of liberal bourgeois and landlords... [this government]

cannot give the peoples of Russia (and the nations tied to us by the war) either peace, bread or full freedom. The working class must therefore continue its fight for socialism and peace..."⁸ And in "Letters on Tactics," written in April just after his return to Russia, he denounced his earlier slogan:

"The person who now speaks only of a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry' is behind the times...he has in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques (it may be called the archive of 'old Bolsheviks.')" Later, in the same writing, he attacked one of these "old Bolsheviks" for proposing that the party should follow the revolutionary masses instead of sticking to their own, communist program: "Comrade Kamenev contraposes to a 'party of the masses' a 'group of propagandists.' But the 'masses' have now succumbed to the craze of 'revolutionary' defencism. Is it not more becoming for internationalists at this moment to show that they can resist 'mass' intoxication rather than to 'wish to remain' with the masses, *i.e.*, to succumb to the general epidemic? Have we not seen how in all the belligerent countries of Europe the chauvinists tried to justify themselves on the grounds that they wished to 'remain with the masses?'"⁹

Lenin here refers to old Bolsheviks, principally Stalin and Kamenev, who had taken over leadership in the party press while Lenin was still in exile. The Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), who comprised most of the leadership in the soviets, had guided the workers into collaboration with the Provisional Government, while the Bolshevik leadership had at first put forward opposition to the Provisional Government and the war more or less along the lines that Lenin had advocated. But Stalin and Kamenev,

after returning from their Siberian exile in March, took over the editorship of the party paper *Pravda* and moved the position of the Bolsheviks sharply to the right. They advocated limited support to the Provisional Government, denounced the slogan "Down with the war," and demanded an end to disorganizing efforts at the front, which Bolshevik agitators had been encouraging. Kamenev proclaimed in *Pravda* that, "While there is no peace, the people must remain steadfastly at their posts, answering bullet with bullet and shell with shell." The slogan 'Down with the war' is useless, echoed Stalin the next day."¹⁰

Lenin replied with his "April Theses," spoken at the Finland Station, and delivered to the party within days of his arrival, and subsequent works and statements such as "The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution," in which he hammered away on all his key points: no support to the bourgeois Provisional Government or the pursuance of the Anglo/French/Tsarist inter-imperialist war; for renunciation of all imperialist annexations, secret treaties and capitalist interests; and for the nationalization of the land under the control of peasant soviets, and the expropriation of the banks and capitalist syndicates. All of this was to be pulled together with a "new type of state," bringing the working class to power, which "could only" be established through the soviets of workers and poor peasants.¹¹

Lenin's April Theses dumbfounded some Bolshevik leaders

This last point, of all power to the soviets, left Bolsheviks dumbfounded when Lenin first proposed it to an informal gathering of party members and others in Petrograd on the evening after his arrival at Finland Station, according to Nikolai Nikolayevich Sukhanov, a former Socialist Revolutionary, who was present at the event. "...no one had ever dreamt of

them [*i.e.*, the soviets] as organs of state power, and unique and enduring ones besides. ...this whole schema was incomprehensible."¹² While Sukhanov clearly had his own conceptual lenses in this observation, Lenin was indeed a minority of one for a time on the main issues of his "April Theses," which were first published in *Pravda* a few days later with only his signature—no one else had signed on—and with a disparaging introduction by the editors to boot.

This was a party cadre which, though it immensely respected Lenin as its historic leader, was nevertheless still stuck in its "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" formula, in which the workers would make the bourgeois revolution, and only then fight for their own demands, perhaps sometime later. However, it was also a committed and disciplined party, which was clear that this was a workers' revolution. And since the immediate tasks in the workers' eyes, such as ending the war, feeding the people, mobilizing against the counter-revolution, abolishing the landed estates, and even establishing an eight-hour work day were being actively opposed and resisted by the government of the capitalists and landlords, it was not long before most Bolsheviks came around to Lenin's view. As Trotsky later related in his seminal *History of the Russian Revolution*:

"Once the Leninist formulas were issued, they shed a new light for the Bolsheviks upon the experience of the past months and of every new day. In the broad mass of the party, a quick differentiation took place—leftward and leftward, toward the theses of Lenin. 'District after district adhered to them,' says Zalezhsy, and by the time of the all-party conference on April 24, the Petersburg organization as a whole was in favor of the theses.' The struggle for the re-arming of the Bolshevik ranks, begun on the evening of April 3, was essentially finished by the end of the month."¹³

The revolution, enabled

So it was that Lenin, and soon the Bolshevik Party with him, had grasped the real issues in the class struggle that were operative in Russia in 1917, and come around to the permanent revolution analysis put forward by Trotsky in 1904-06, and first enunciated by Marx in 1850. This is what enabled the October Revolution: it laid the basis in the leadership for the conquest of power by the working class, and the subsequent transformation of Russia into a workers state that managed to survive for decades, despite the Soviet state's later degeneration into a distorted, bureaucratic shadow of its former self. The impact of this historic 1917 victory still reverberates, and its lessons inform and instruct conscious revolutionaries to this day. Meanwhile Stalin, who in a few years would be condemning the permanent revolution as a Trotskyite heresy, quietly supported Lenin, and slipped into the background.

There were, of course, many hurdles between the acceptance of the April Theses and the final insurrection in October which established the new workers state, including continued opposition from the right within the Bolshevik Party, as well as some challenges from the left, such as when the Petrograd workers sought an immediate insurrection during the July days. The Bolsheviks opposed this at that time because the masses throughout the country were not ready for that as yet. And the Bolshevik Party was not strong enough. Lenin never sought decisive actions in isolation; only when the masses were clearly on board. The Kornilov affair, in which a reactionary Tsarist General organized an attempt at a counterrevolutionary assault on Petrograd, in collaboration with Kerensky, the "socialist" then head of the Provisional Government, was stopped in a well organized mass response by the Petrograd proletariat, who recruited most of Kornilov's troops to the revolutionary banner, and thus demonstrated the working-

class resolve to preserve and protect the revolution from any backsliding. And the October insurrection happened just at the opening of the second All-Russian Congress of Soviets as Lenin planned, despite some opposition on the timing, and the defection of Kamenev and Zinoviev (Lenin's close ally in exile and collaborator at the Zimmerwald antiwar conferences) in opposing the insurrection plan in the public press!

Trotsky sees the need for the Bolshevik Party

Trotsky, who arrived back in Russia from exile in New York only by the 4th of May, when the theoretical re-arming of the Bolshevik Party was mostly completed, soon joined the Bolsheviks and became a stalwart ally of Lenin throughout the revolutionary period, including by serving as the chief organizer and leader of the Red Army throughout the Civil War. It should be noted that in his 1919 Preface to the re-issue of *Results and Prospects*, Trotsky acknowledged his error in not recognizing the importance of the Bolshevik Party earlier:

"...the author [*i.e.*, Trotsky] did not fully appreciate the very important circumstance that in reality, along the line of the disagreement between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, there were being grouped inflexible revolutionaries on the one side and, on the other, elements which were becoming more and more opportunist and accommodating. When the Revolution of 1917 broke out, the Bolshevik Party constituted a strong centralized organization uniting all the best elements of the advanced workers and revolutionary intellectuals, which—after some internal struggle—frankly adopted tactics directed towards the socialist dictatorship of the working class, in full harmony with the entire international situation and class relations in Russia."¹⁴

The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in October was fully in

accord with the needs and demands of the masses, with the permanent revolution, and with Lenin's April Theses, which had called for all power to the soviets. Other approaches to power from both within (rightists such as Kamenev) and without (Mensheviks and SRs) the Bolshevik Party, such as focusing on the Constituent Assembly or on a coalition of all the parties of the soviets, would have resulted in a petty-bourgeois government and a continuation of capitalism. After a thunderous endorsement of power to the soviets by the delegates of the second all-Russian Congress, 60 percent of whom were Bolsheviks, the first two decrees of the new government were proposed and passed overwhelmingly: peace and land. The Provisional Government, despite its many promises of reform, had in its nine months of existence come nowhere near the initial accomplishments of this workers' government in these two critical decrees.

The first, on ending the war, demanded an armistice, and "immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace." The Bolshevik government declared that it "considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war." It denounced the secret diplomacy which had contributed to the start of the war, and pledged to "proceed immediately with the full publication of the secret treaties," which it presently did, much to the chagrin of all the competing imperialist powers, whether friend or foe of Russia. The decree also denounced all plans of the Tsarist and other governments regarding annexations of territory, and declared that all such territories should have the right to a free vote on their fate. With this statement alone, the Bolsheviks announced to the world their renunciation of capitalism and imperialism, and secured their place in history by putting the interests of humanity first, ahead of nationalism, imperialism, and all exploitative interests.¹⁵

The Bolshevik land decree

The Decree on Land, which like the Decree On Peace is so important for understanding in today's world, was also revolutionary in its intent and implications. The Decree, written by Lenin and fully supported by Trotsky, had as its first clause, "1. *Landed proprietorship is abolished forthwith without any compensation,*" period. And later, under the clause, "The most equitable settlement of the land question is to be as follows," we have "1. Private ownership of land shall be abolished forever; land shall not be sold, purchased, leased, mortgaged, or otherwise alienated. All land, whether state, crown, monastery, church, factory, entailed, public, peasant, *etc.*, shall be confiscated without compensation and become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who cultivate it."¹⁶

Despite its clear wording of explicit state expropriation of the land—*i.e.*, nationalization without compensation—the Land Decree did not have the immediate effect of abolishing private holding in land. While making land "become the property of the whole people," it nevertheless allowed the land to "pass into the use of all those who cultivate it," which meant that peasants, now freed from the rent and debt to landlord and money lender, which ever increasing burden they had suffered under ever since the abolition of serfdom in 1861, could divide up the large estates, and work the land that they had long held as their own, free and clear. The wording of the decree was in fact based on the "land to the tiller" program of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the descendants of Narodniks, populists who based themselves on the peasantry. Although the Land Decree was approved by a resounding acclamation, Lenin did face questions about it from some Bolsheviks. When asked after the passage of the Land Decree why he had applied the agrarian program of the SRs instead of his own, he said:

"Voices are being raised here that the decree itself and the Mandate were drawn up by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. What of it? Does it matter who drew them up? As a democratic government, we cannot ignore the decision of the masses of the people.... Let the peasants solve this problem from one end and we shall solve it from the other. Experience will allow us to draw together in the general stream of revolutionary creative work, in the elaboration of new state farms. We must be guided by experience; we must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses." While the old, Tsarist government had only "fought the peasants," Lenin continued: "The peasants have learned something during the eight months of our revolution; they want to settle all land problems themselves.... The point is that the peasants should be firmly assured that there are no more landowners in the countryside, that they themselves must decide all questions, and that they themselves must arrange their own lives."¹⁷

Rosa Luxemburg on the land decree

Rosa Luxemburg, though a firm supporter of the Bolshevik Revolution, said that "Formerly, there was only a small caste of noble and capitalist proprietors and a small minority of rich village bourgeoisie to oppose a socialist reform on the land. And their expropriation by a revolutionary mass movement of the people is mere child's play."¹⁸ Whose expropriation is "mere child's play," the noble and capitalist proprietors and rich village bourgeoisie, or them plus the mass of the peasantry, who thought the land belonged to them? And who was to do the expropriating, in the absence of an active, mass rural proletariat? Much as I respect Rosa Luxemburg, I must say that this statement is an over-simplification, which ignored the realities in Russia.

The peasants had indeed been learning something after the overthrow of

the Tsar in the February Revolution, and the situation was "unstable" to say the least. In rural areas during the summer and fall of 1917 all hell was breaking loose. As the air of revolution permeated the countryside, peasants began to invade the big landed estates and cart off crops of hay and other resources such as tools and other implements. Some of the estate owners tried to get the weak Provisional Government's support to protect their properties to no avail, up until July, that is. Many panicked and sold their estates to foreign investors, notably from France (which was Tsarist Russia's major trade and investment partner.) The expropriation of the landlords was proceeding apace!

The peasants were also looking around for leadership. This is when the Socialist Revolutionaries, who promised, "land to the tiller," surged to prominence as the peasants' chief representatives. As Trotsky put it in 1923, "The Socialist Revolutionaries considered that the peasantry was created for the purpose of being under their leadership and, through them, to rule the country."¹⁹ The inability of the peasantry to take power on its own, and the fact that the peasantry in power would mean rule by the petty-bourgeoisie, and hence the capitalist parties, completely escaped the understanding of the SRs. More to the point, the SRs along with Menshevik ministers were in fact the petty bourgeois government, by virtue of their majority in the Kerensky cabinet—Kerensky himself being an SR—as of May. Yet not only did they do nothing to implement their "land and freedom" program, which had the full backing of the peasantry, but after the defeat of the insurrectionary movement of the Petrograd workers in July, the Provisional Government (with its SR ministers!) sent troops to defend the landlords in the countryside, and managed to reverse some of the peasants' gains. As a result, reports Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, "...the

peasants steadily lost confidence in both the government and the [SR] party. Thus the swelling out of the Social Revolutionary organizations in the villages became fatal to this universal party, which was rebelling at the bottom but restoring order at the top.”²⁰

SRs had to be driven out of power

Despite all this, the SRs still had the nerve to criticize Lenin over the Land Decree: “The SRs cried: ‘A fine Marxist, who for fifteen years baited us from the heights of his grandeur for our petty-bourgeois lack of science, and then executed our program the moment he took power!’ And Lenin snapped back: ‘A fine party, that had to be driven out of power for its program to be realized!’”²¹

This brief exchange captured something fundamental: only the working class in power could finally uproot the aristocratic remnants of feudalism, and implement the basic democratic demands of the masses that petty-bourgeois or peasant parties were unable to bring about. But what about the socialist demands? Did the Bolsheviks’ failure to immediately establish a system of collective agriculture mean they had betrayed the permanent revolution, the theory Lenin adhered to, and which Trotsky had promoted early in the century?

The first thing to note in answer to this question is that Lenin’s Bolsheviks had adhered to their own formula, that this revolution had to be a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry. This support had not been acquired through the earlier Bolshevik slogan of a joint dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. This would have been two-class rule, as in, for instance (hypothetically,) a joint government of Bolsheviks and SRs. Rather; it had been achieved by the inability of the SRs to implement their own program, and by the accession to power of the Bolsheviks alone (along with Left SRs, who recognized the need for working class rule.)

As Trotsky put it, “The chief task lay in the substance of the historic task itself—a democratic agrarian revolution.” (See footnote 19)

Secondly, the Leninists had not for an instant forgotten the need for a class differentiation in the countryside. Lenin had tirelessly pursued attempts to organize the agricultural laborers and other poor peasants into their own soviets and other organizations, counterposed to the kulaks, who were often their employers. As more and more big landlord holdings were being looted however, the kulaks and small-land-owning peasants took the lead and had the advantage of well-fed horses and carts to hold crops and equipment. So, in the thirst for “land and freedom,” the peasants had instead rallied behind the better-off. Thus the Land Decree could only implement collectivization as a future goal, through state ownership of the land. As a result, the kulaks did become a brake on the further development of the revolution, by withholding grain from the cities and, in a few cases, supporting counterrevolutionary forces in the Civil War.

Third and finally, if the Bolsheviks hadn’t adopted the Land Decree when they did, the revolution could well have been doomed. In this massive and mostly agrarian country, peasant support was vital, and the peasants needed to be “...assured that there are no more landowners in the countryside,” as Lenin said in his opposition to critics (above.) Or, as Victor Serge said in his *Year One of the Revolution*, the Land Decree “alone would make the new authority invincible, by assuring it the support of millions of peasants.”²² A vital part of this is that the new workers’ state had to deal with providing the peasants with modern machinery—tractors, tools *etc.*—in order to make any collectives viable. This would have required a transformation of industry, which was essentially impossible, especially given the looming danger of counterrevolutionary assaults and

imperialist interventions. If the Bolsheviks had immediately counterposed themselves to, and alienated the mass of the peasantry with collectivization efforts which they weren’t ready for, and which the state couldn’t provide the tools for, they easily could have gone down in flames in the ensuing civil war, and the chance of future socialization would have been lost. As it was, Bolsheviks did promote communal efforts, and special experimental farming collectives and other collective farms wherever possible. Overall, the Lenin and Trotsky-led workers state, threatened as it was in the next few years with all sorts of potential disasters, nevertheless did a spectacular job of implementing the permanent revolution.

The Bolshevik housing policy

The housing policy of the Bolsheviks, though a much less prominent feature of their program compared to the land policy, is nevertheless important for the lessons it carries for today. In both the land policy and the housing policy, the workers state sought to dissolve the bonds of private property.

In his polemic against anarchists in *State and Revolution*, Lenin outlined the principles of the Bolshevik position on housing, first by quoting Engels on *The Housing Question*:

“... one thing is certain: there is already a sufficient quantity of houses in the big cities to remedy immediately all real ‘housing shortage,’ provided they are used judiciously. This can naturally only occur through the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses homeless workers or workers overcrowded in their present homes.” Lenin quotes further, “...It must be pointed out that the ‘actual seizure’ of all the instruments of labor, the taking possession of industry as a whole by the working people, is the exact opposite of the Proudhonist [anarchist] ‘redemption.’ In the latter case the individual worker becomes the owner of his

dwelling, the peasant farm, the instruments of labor; in the former case, the 'working people' become the collective owners of the houses, factories, and instruments of labor..."

Lenin himself added that, "The letting of houses owned by the whole people to individual families presupposes the collection of rent, a certain amount of control, and the employment of some standard in allotting the housing. All this calls for a certain form of state.... The transition to a situation in which it will be possible to supply dwellings rent-free depends on the complete 'withering away' of the state."²³ All of this adds up to a fundamental change in how society was organized, and how the needs of the masses were to be met, which, needless to say, would have been impossible without the complete abolition of capitalism which the Bolshevik insurrection and establishment of the workers state made possible.

These principles began to be implemented immediately after the October Revolution in major cities in Russia, as masses of working people in the cities moved into an active political life, forming committees of all sorts to make the workers' state a reality on the ground, so to speak. On the question of housing, local soviets struggled to keep up. In September of 1918, for instance, the Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Red Army Deputies issued a decree on the commandeering of dwellings, *etc.*, which provided for a housing commission to be set up in each district "With the object of finding, and providing workers with healthy dwellings..." conducting inspections and redistributions of tenants as necessary, with preferences for working people and noting that: "Persons engaged in work of public necessity are to be provided with a dwelling in the region where they work."²⁴

Ongoing problems in housing

Of course there were problems involved with Soviet housing from the

start, such as inability of the workers' state to renovate old, and build new housing during the time of famine, civil war and counterrevolutionary threats both internally and from abroad. These led to conflicts within families over shared facilities, and problems of overcrowding. And such problems were compounded by an influx of former landowners and others into the cities, many of whom were declared "parasites" who needed to be moved out of town to make way for workers. In later years, many of these problems were indeed on going.

However, to judge by the numerous critiques of Soviet housing that emerged in modern times, one would think that problems such as these were the whole story, as they repeat endless horror stories about inadequate housing in the USSR. Yet, how many homeless people were there in the Soviet Union? Virtually none. One article, by Jeff Harrison of the University of Arizona, about the switch to private ownership following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, brought home another side of the story: today's Russians don't like mortgages, and can't understand why Americans think they own their own homes if they are saddled with a mortgage. Harrison quotes Jane Zavisca in 2011, in a review of a then-forthcoming book of hers: "It may be a legacy of Soviet entitlement to housing, where housing is viewed as a right to them. Even though the Soviet government owned the housing, people thought of it as their own and had the right to pass it down to their children, or swap with someone who wanted to trade with you.' She said Russians find it odd that Americans call themselves 'homeowners' from the day they close on a mortgage loan. For Russians, ownership only begins after all debts are paid off."²⁵ How true that was for millions of so-called "homeowners" in the U.S. who lost their homes in the mortgage fraud-induced crash of 2008!

Capitalism equals fraud and homelessness

Fighting against the endless rent increases, fraudulent mortgage foreclosures and homelessness under capitalism is indeed a very hard slog. Many cooperatives which start out as "affordable housing" opportunities eventually give way to privatization, and many private, including city-subsidized projects are still not affordable for the low-income would-be tenants. The market economy in housing promotes rapid gentrification, which is enriching landlords while destroying traditional low-income neighborhoods. Runaway increases in housing costs in San Francisco, for instance, are destroying the historic Mission district, and creating a teacher shortage by preventing education workers from living in the city where they teach.

Some cooperative housing organizations are able to make a small dent in the capitalist/landlord armor by adopting a mode which bears a resemblance to the principles of land and housing adopted in the Russian Revolution: the community land trust (CLT). A CLT operates by separating ownership of the land from ownership of the building in a contractual arrangement, which prevents privatization and preserves affordability for even the lowest income tenants. The Cooper Square Committee (CSC) in New York City got its start in 1959 by successfully opposing city planner Robert Moses' "slum removal" and re-development assault on the Lower East Side neighborhood, which had threatened to displace thousands of inhabitants. It ultimately saved over 300 buildings. The CSC then set up a CLT based on donations, and on take-overs of buildings abandoned by landlords and owned by the City, and now manages nearly 400 low-income apartments in 23 buildings. More recently in California, the Bay Area Community Land Trust uses the same principles to provide low-income housing, currently in 18 build-

ings. Ownership of the land under the building by the CLT, combined with cooperative management of the housing and democratic leadership structures is what preserves the low-income housing. These solutions hold promise, but can only be fully implemented through the expropriation of the banks, and nationwide nationalization of the land, so that all working people may enjoy the benefits.

Lessons for today from the revolution of 1917

Housing is a right, and homelessness is abolished! Mortgage debt to the big banks is liquidated, and rents are fixed at a reasonable percentage of a tenant's income! The rich are expropriated, and their tenement buildings and multiple palatial homes and condominiums are divided up to provide adequate housing for all working people! Such are just some of the possibilities suggested by the Russian Revolution if its lessons were to be applied in the modern world today. But that is not all. If we widen the lens a bit, we can see applications of lessons from the Russian Revolution throughout the crisis of 2008, for instance. In this crisis, the U.S. government bailed out the big banks, not the homeowners who had lost their homes to fraud, and it also bailed out the auto industry when General Motors faced bankruptcy. Of course it was a different time with different conditions, but in the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks were very careful to address the specific situation with appropriate demands which carried the revolutionary process forward, such as "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers!" This demand addressed a particular situation—that of socialists serving in the Provisional government alongside bourgeois representatives—and helped the working class to see that by combining with capitalist forces, the Social Democrats were holding back the essential immediate demands of the working masses, summed up as bread, peace and land. Trotsky would later call this a "transi-

tional demand," which is a demand which, in order to be realized, must drive the class struggle forward toward workers' revolution.

In 2008 in the U.S. there was no such revolutionary situation, and no mass revolutionary party to implement such a strategy. But if we focus on the lessons of the Russian Revolution, we can see how such a party might have begun to build itself up into a position to actually effect the class struggle. Instead of the government's bail out of General Motors, we might have demanded: "Nationalize big auto without compensation and under workers' control!" And we might have added, "Employ auto workers to transform the industry to make electric and hybrid autos only!" With that, we would have expanded our scope to include not just housing, and not just auto, but the threat of global warming as well, which challenges not just workers but the planet as a whole to wake up to what is ahead for all of us. And if that last demand (or maybe all of them) seems like a stretch, then so was the Russian Revolution itself. Lenin said in January 1917 that, "We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution. But I can, I believe, express the confident hope that the youth...will be fortunate enough not only to fight, but also to win, in the coming proletarian revolution."²⁶ In a month or so, the Russian Revolution had entered into history.

Despite its many great achievements, this revolution degenerated into a shadow of its former self within six to seven years. Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx himself, along with most Bolsheviks, had expected the revolution to happen first in the most advanced industrial countries, such as Germany, rather than in backward Russia. And the Bolshevik leadership was clear that a socialist revolution in Russia could not survive unless it spread into Europe. There was a great revolutionary upsurge throughout Europe and the world fol-

lowing the revolution and the end of the war, but none besides Russia ended in the conquest of power by the working class. Then, with the failure of the German Revolution in October 1923—due to inadequate leadership both in the German party and at the head of the Communist International (CI)—things in Russia quickly began to change. The Russian workers, exhausted by civil war and deprivation—and with the untimely death of Lenin in 1924—became demoralized. The revolutionary state was captured by a conservative, bureaucratic *clique* headed by Joseph Stalin, who proclaimed that Russia would survive with "socialism in one country," a formula unheard of before in the canon of revolutionary and internationalist Marxism. The purposes for which Russia was ruled, the way it was ruled, and its leadership all changed. It was Russia's Thermidor.²⁷

Stalin distorted and destroyed the lessons of 1917

The Stalin regime distorted or dispensed with all the revolutionary lessons of 1917. That the working class needs an independent, disciplined revolutionary party to make a revolution even in a backward country was replaced with orders for the Chinese CP to enter the bourgeois nationalist Kuomintang, which led to a slaughter of the revolutionary workers in 1927. That the workers should refuse to enter or support coalition governments with capitalist parties—as Social Democrats did in the Provisional Government in Russia—was replaced with support for the "popular front" of workers' and bourgeois parties, which led to the defeat of the revolution in Spain in the 1930s. Even the principle of the united-front, in which the working class struggles independently but alongside other socialists against a counterrevolutionary threat (such as Kornilov) was abandoned, which led to the virtually unopposed coming to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933. All this was a result of Stalin's international strategy, which

abandoned revolutionary politics for a policy of diplomatic alliances to protect the Soviet Union. With the 1933 German defeat, Trotsky, now several years in exile, declared the Third International dead, and called for formation of a new Fourth International of revolutionary workers parties.

Every step of the way, from his work with a *Left Opposition in Russia* in the 1920s to his fight to build new revolutionary parties around the world, Trotsky fought to uphold and extend to the world the lessons of the Russian Revolution of 1917. With regard to the great gains of the Russian Revolution, and the inspiration they provide for revolutionary answers to critical problems from the housing crisis to the largest global issues, we can only say, with Trotsky as he was dying from a blow inflicted by a Stalinist agent, “go forward.”

1 “...referring to the 17th century English author Thomas Hobbes, whose best-known work, *Leviathan*, describes a situation of unrestrained, selfish and uncivilized competition.” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Hobbesian>

2 Marx and Engels, “Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League,” London, March 1850, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Moscow 1962, p. 110.

3 Karl Marx, “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” New York 1852, in *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Moscow 1962, p. 338.

4 Lenin, VI, “Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution,” June-July 1905, in *Collected Works*, (CW) Vol. 9, Moscow 1962.

5 Trotsky, Leon, “Preface to the Re-Issue of this work,” (1919) in *Results and Prospects*, 1906. This preface is Trotsky’s summary of his views in 1904-05. About the “minimum” and “maximum” program, this was the rationalization of Social Democrats to justify their focus on reform of the capitalist system. When it

came to imperialist war or socialism, they betrayed both Marxism and the working classes of the world.

6 Leon Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/rp-index.htm>.

7 Lenin, VI, “Lecture on the 1905 Revolution,” January 9, 1917, in CW vol. 23, Moscow 1964.

8 Lenin, VI, “Draft Theses, March 4 1917” in CW vol. 23, Moscow 1964.

9 Lenin, VI, “Letters On Tactics,” April 8 and 13th, 1917, CW vol. 24, Moscow 1964.

10 Rabinowitch, A, *Prelude To Revolution, The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising*, Indiana University Press, 1968, page 36.

11 Lenin, VI, CW vol. 24, *op.cit.*, contains both these documents.

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Russian Revolution and Workers Democracy

BY SUZI WEISSMAN

The Russian Revolution of February and October 1917 opened up a new historical epoch, and was greeted with enthusiasm by workers around the world. Never before had workers come close to winning power, though many participated in political life in the Social Democratic parties of Western Europe.

Suddenly, in Russia, revolution was an actuality, not simply a hope or a threat. Victor Serge described the intoxicating power of that moment as one where “life is beginning anew, where conscious will, intelligence, and an inexorable love of mankind are in action.”

The unique element at the heart of the Russian revolutionary process was its revolutionary working class—and the democratic form of self-organization that it created in struggle that made the idea and reality of power possible. Urban workers led and dominated the opposition to the old order and ultimately brought into being—for the first time in world history—a workers state, albeit in embryonic form.

The movement toward revolution by the working class was facilitated, perhaps paradoxically, by the underdeveloped nature of Russian society compared to the West. There was little in Tsarist Russia of the highly evolved civil society that had developed over many centuries in Western Europe.

The autocracy did not allow freely contested elections to a parliament with the ability to legislate, nor legal political parties, nor minimal formal liberties of speech, assembly and press. Nor did Russia possess the legal mass reformist parties with their parliamentary delegations, trade union leaderships and radical newspapers, not to mention sports clubs, popular theaters and the like, that played such a central role in the West’s working-class politics.

The virtual non-existence in Russia of these networks was to an important degree because Russia lacked a mature capitalist class—the sort of bourgeoisie that had elsewhere, over time, thrown up the institutions of civil society made possible by capitalist productivity and economic surpluses.

Consequently the working class in Tsarist Russia could carry the revolution forward with stunning speed relative to the more developed capitalist world, but only to the degree it built its own power through creating and expanding the political sway of profoundly democratic forms of self-government. The working class could make the revolution because it could win a political majority. Beginning in the urban centers of Petrograd and Moscow and then rolling across the empire, it overthrew the old order and brought to power authentically revolutionary mass institutions.

But this ended up being the limit of its power. It then faced a series of obstacles—objective conditions—that it could only overcome through non-democratic means. To the extent the Russian working class sought to take the revolution beyond this point, it could do so only by leaving behind its vibrant institutions of workers democracy. And to the degree it left workers democracy behind, it undermined the effective foundations of its own rule.

As workers democracy was progressively weakened, the revolutionary regime was undermined, transformed, and ultimately supplanted by its opposite—a bureaucratic authoritarian, terroristic tyranny. The evisceration of the workers’ councils, it turned out, traced the path of the revolution’s ascent, decline and defeat from within.

Workers’ self-organization and power

When the Russian working class came to power with the slogan “all power to the soviets,” workers around the world greeted the revolution with jubilation—because it represented their broadest aspirations, “a new democracy of free workers, such as had never before been seen.” (Victor Serge, *From Lenin to Stalin*, 1937, 22)

In the frontline cities of Petrograd and Moscow, Tashkent and Kazan, and in the provinces from Tula to Tambov, Ryazan to Kaluga, in the networks of railroads across the country, hundreds-of-thousands of workers, peasants and soldiers (“the toiling masses”) took their fate into their own hands. They organized collectively at the level of industry, agriculture and garrisons, forming committees and councils to fight their bosses and the Tsarist regime.

In the process, they created innovative forms of self-rule: workers’ councils, peasants’ councils, soldiers’ councils—soviets in Russian parlance. This new democratic form of self-organization arose spontaneously and quickly blossomed independently from the existing political parties, distinguishing the Russian revolutionary process from the beginning and inspiring working people around the world.

The soviets had made their first appearance in 1905, and were swiftly adopted as an organizing tool by workers around the globe as a higher form of political organization for the working class. Soviets were organized democratically, joined voluntarily, enjoyed freedom of speech and representation for various political currents and were hotbeds of revolutionary ferment.

The soviets became the workers’ state in embryo, functioning as an alternative government, an organ of

self-government and working-class power. This was an historic upheaval—and a significant step forward for concretizing democracy—because it meant that the parties had to compete for workers’ allegiance in a common political arena. Russian workers developed their politics, their leaderships, and their power to fight the employers and the state at the same time.

The defeat of the revolution of 1905 initially threw the country into a period of deep reaction driven by counter-revolution. This period of political stasis and decline, however, was short-lived. Powered especially by the military buildup that reflected the intensification of inter-imperialist rivalry leading up to World War I, the spectacular growth of heavy industry led to a rapid and tumultuous expansion of the urban working class.

This new industrial working class, recruited from the countryside, was concentrated in coal, iron, steel and military equipment. As a result, the terrain of struggle for working-class democracy and power between the two revolutions of 1905 and 1917 shifted to industrial workers. Particularly during the 1912-1914 period came an enormous growth of workers’ struggles and strikes.

As the trade union struggle became the chief school for working-class democratization, radicalism and revolutionary politics, the Bolsheviks displayed their capacity to dynamize and lead the struggle. By the outbreak of the war, the Bolsheviks had secured a strong political majority in the trade union movement. This became the springboard for their politically winning over the urban working class in 1917.

Tsarist Russia’s entry into World War I, accompanied by “delirious patriotism,” temporarily ended labor’s dynamism, but by 1917 the horrors of war mowed down an entire generation of young men—military defeats, death and maiming on the battlefield, widespread hunger and diseases resulting

from the disruption of the economy, and the general destabilization of everyday life served to provoke a new upsurge.

More than three million soldiers were killed. When the empire collapsed with the abdication of the Tsar in February, the Russian people, armed with guns from the war, were ready to fight for power.

April Theses: “All power to the Soviets”

The Revolution of 1917 took up where the Revolution of 1905 left off; it was from start to finish a story of workers’ initiatives to amass and ultimately take power. The mobilized masses had become increasingly combative and turned toward revolution as the Russian empire crumbled, unleashing all the political and economic difficulties of military defeat.

By February 1917 there were strikes and a huge mass rising, with workers taking to the streets and calling for an end to the incompetent autocracy they could no longer tolerate. They demanded bread, land, and peace. This encapsulated their grievances: exhausted from the war, the shortage of bread and the incomplete emancipation of the peasants from serfdom.

They poured into central Petrograd and overthrew the Tsar and his regime. The urban working-class revolution expanded its democratic base by winning the support of the peasants because it overthrew the rule of the Tsar and the feudal aristocracy, and because the Bolsheviks advanced popular demands for land, bread and peace.

But the overthrow of the autocracy posed in acute fashion the problem of the nature of the revolution in progress and what was to be its outcome. Almost overnight a situation called “dual power” emerged.

At one pole, replacing the Tsarist regime, a new provisional government began to meet, bringing together all the forces favoring order and property—

liberal nobles, professionals, bourgeoisie. At the opposite pole were the workers’ councils, and specifically the Petrograd Soviet, directly representing the radical revolutionizing working class. In March 1917, all forces in play in the soviets agreed, at least in formal terms, that what was on the agenda was the “bourgeois democratic revolution.” But what did that mean?

The Bolsheviks, who played a central role in the February revolution, stuck to the Marxist orthodoxy to which they had committed themselves a decade earlier—the revolution would be “bourgeois democratic” (*i.e.*, not an immediate assault on capitalist production and property.) But they appreciated the paradoxical character of this notion in the Russian case, given the limited extent and cramped manner in which capitalism had developed there.

Capitalist industry developed under the auspices of, and was politically dependent upon, the old regime: in particular, the military industry was directly driven by the state. At the same time, the capitalist class oversaw an industrial sector that had a distinctly modern form—no longer the small businesses of artisans and shopkeepers who, in earlier times, had ultimately seen it in their interest to defend private property.

This meant the bourgeoisie in Russia had to confront an unprecedentedly radical proletariat aiming to overthrow private property. The capitalists were in essence anti-revolutionary. They identified with the old order; opposed even their own “bourgeois democratic revolution” in any form; and, following the February overthrow of the Tsar, were dead set on restoring the old political regime in some form.

In fact, the liberals in the provisional government had the goal of ceding power to the old monarchy—demanding merely that it be constitutional. The working class was thus the only social force that could make the revolution, and push the democratic

revolution to its limit in a manner totally opposed by the bourgeoisie itself—free elections, free speech, the right of free propaganda, the eight-hour day. This is in fact what it did.

But there was a problem implicit in the notion of a bourgeois revolution carried out against the bourgeoisie by the working class, a problem clearly articulated by Leon Trotsky. There was no place for a “bourgeois democratic” society to emerge “between” the old regime and workers power.

The bourgeoisie was not numerous, and in political terms had virtually ceased to function once the February Revolution and subsequent abdication of the Tsar had taken place. This left the working class to carry out the tasks of development supposedly reserved for a democratic revolution. The liberal nobles, capitalists and professionals were in opposition and in any case lacked the capital, skills and will to do so.

The working class had no choice, Trotsky argued, but to establish working-class power in order to consolidate the democratic revolution, overthrowing the bourgeoisie in the process. However since the bourgeoisie would oppose working-class power at every turn, the only way to insure workers’ democratic rule would be to abolish bourgeois property. This impelled the working class to establish revolutionary governance. If it tried to stop the process before it had destroyed the material foundations of the old ruling classes, it would be crushed by domestic reaction.¹

When Lenin returned from Swiss exile, the essence of Trotsky’s conception was presented in concrete political terms before him. Arriving at the Finland station in Petrograd, Lenin understood that the revolution now required recognizing that the power of the soviets was everything [they held the power, the provisional government did not], hence the demand “All Power to the Soviets.” He dared the soviets to seize power, but the Bolsheviks’ *Pravda* disavowed him,

as did most party leaders. Not so the workers in the streets, factories and barracks who eagerly agreed: Lenin had expressed, as no other politician had, what they wanted to hear.

Within three weeks Lenin had a majority in the party, and the program was for power, a democratic proletarian and peasant soviet republic, with the hegemony of the working class at its center.²

October 1917: Workers come to power

The standard view in the West, central to discrediting the October Revolution, is that it was just a violent *coup* by the minority Bolshevik leadership who had manipulated their way to power, overturning a nascent democracy, mobilizing the working class behind them like soldiers following their officers.

The overwhelming evidence from a century of in-depth historical scholarship shows otherwise. Political life within the Bolshevik party and its leadership, as in the soviets, was intensely collective and democratic with tendencies appearing and disappearing with rise, resolution and new appearance of disagreements. The Bolsheviks were able to succeed precisely because they were organized not in a top-down, militarist way but in a highly decentralized manner. They could respond immediately to workers’ initiatives and integrate large numbers rapidly into their ranks.

From this vantage point, the Bolsheviks prevailed not because they could direct the workers’ movement from above but because, as result of their capacity to represent the working class in every changing phase of struggle, they could quickly respond to workers’ shifting demands, objectives and moods.

Worker activists made the Bolshevik party their organization, even as these militants collaborated on the ground with worker members of other parties. The Bolsheviks came to represent the working class at its most creative and radical, when the class could actually

shape the party to its needs. They expressed the aspirations of the workers and potential for power. Their popularity grew from the confidence they earned, as their words and actions were debated democratically in the soviets and discussed on the streets.

The tactical and strategic skill of Lenin and Trotsky was crucial to the victorious revolution, but they were only first among comrades, their leadership and that of the Bolsheviks based on the effectiveness of their activity. As Victor Serge described it, the revolution triumphed because of the soviets, dual power and a party of capable leaders who understood the historical moment, could “see reality, grasp possibility, and conceive the action which [would be] the link between the real and the possible.” (Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, 58.)

So crucial was the place of workers self-rule in the unfolding of the revolution that, on the eve of taking power, Lenin was moved to theorize it in *State and Revolution*, written in August and September 1917. Looking back to the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871 for the model of workers’ direct democracy, he captured the spirit and goal of revolution from below. He saw in the soviets the political form for realizing the direct, democratic rule of the producers. Once in power every worker can learn to directly administer the state. *i.e.*, “every cook can govern.”

Trotsky, the twice-elected president of the Petrograd Soviet (1905 and 1917), understood the nature of its revolutionary form and saw its role in democratically coordinating the actions of the proletariat in its struggle for revolutionary power.

The argument that the revolution was the work of a small conspiracy who intended to establish a monopoly of power for themselves from the outset, is easily refuted. The Bolshevik party democratically won majorities for their program in the soviets in the months

leading to October, and on that basis assumed the leadership of the workers and urban society.

At the same time, Bolsheviks succeeded in winning the support of the rank and file of the army—organized in soldiers’ soviets—depriving the Kerensky provisional government of the means of coercion to sustain its rule and constituting the vehicle for the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class. The Russian Revolution was undeniably the most radical ever. In the early months, direct democracy prevailed. Far from dictating to the population, the Bolsheviks typically endorsed initiatives already taken by the masses.

One example: the decree of November 14 invited the workers to “use their own committees to control the production, accounting and financing of the firms they work in,” a call for workers to turn their occupations of workplaces into workers’ control and workers’ ownership. Land and factories were turned over to peasant and worker soviets, the debt was canceled, and banks, trusts and cartels were nationalized.

Whittling down democracy

The Bolshevik party had led the revolution in practice, legitimizing its leadership by winning formal majorities for its program in the soviets. But with its victory, it fell victim to the revolution’s structural lack of a political majority.

- In January 1918, the Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries took office as a minority and argued that the Constituent Assembly, which was to write the constitutional basis for the new regime, was improperly elected. Unless new elections were called, the assembly, dominated by Right Social Revolutionaries (SRs) who opposed the soviets, should not be allowed to continue. When delegates returned for their second day in office, the doors were locked. Lenin admitted that the Constituent Assembly was, in

theory, the highest expression of bourgeois democracy, but in the circumstances its composition would lead directly to counter-revolution and the restoration of some form of the old regime.

- The most pressing objective for the new revolutionary government was to make good on its program and secure peace. No reconstruction of society could be initiated without withdrawing from the imperialist world war. The debate over peace terms had to begin from recognition of the immediate threat from occupying German forces. While this debate caused substantial division in the party and society, it was also an example of the health and vitality of democracy in these early days. However, it led to divisions that had deep consequences.

The Left SRs and Left Communists argued against the “peace of shame,” as they called the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.³ Bolshevik leaders Evgeny Preobrazhensky and Nikolai Bukharin, later to stand on opposite sides of the industrialization debates, joined with others to write the “Theses of Left Communists”—opposing the treaty and proposing to wage a revolutionary war against the Central Powers (most importantly, Germany.)

Lenin maintained that the old army didn’t exist and the new one was just forming therefore that proposal was unrealistic. He said “I want to lose space in order to gain time.” That is, he was willing to give up territory to settle quickly and place his hope on revolutionary developments in the West. His critics warned against trying to preserve the revolution at any cost. Policies that led to the soviets losing their independence would result in transforming Russia from a commune state to one with ruled by a centralized bureaucracy.

Trotsky’s position, “neither peace nor war,” meant stalling for time.

While it seemed to be the reverse of Lenin’s proposal, it was also based on the perspective of seeking aid from the Western proletariat.

Under the terms of Brest-Litovsk, revolutionary Russia lost Poland and the Baltic regions, as well as huge tracts of the Ukraine (27 percent of her sown area, 26 percent of her population, a third of her average crops, three-quarters of her iron and steel and 26 percent of her railway network.) The country was forced to pay six billion gold marks in reparations.

One last horrendous consequence was that the terms of the peace sealed the sacrifice of the Finnish proletariat. The Finnish Commune went down in bloodshed in April 1918—in part because Soviet troops had to leave the border under the treaty’s provisions. Forced to accept the harsh terms by the advance of the German army, Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918.

- The Civil War (1918-1921) and the military invasion by imperialist countries led to the destruction of a significant portion of the urban working class, the agent of the revolution. This long and bloody conflict, in which seven million died, is a dramatic contrast to the relatively bloodless revolution carried out against the defenders of the old order from March through October 1917.

During the Civil War (1918-21), the revolution was hemmed in from all sides: from the old order, the White armies of Admiral Aleksandr Kolchak, Iurii Denikin, General Yudenich and later Pyotr Nikolayevich Wrangel were joined by the armies of fourteen capitalist powers to blockade and strangle the revolution. But armed opposition also came from the bourgeois-liberal Kadets as well as factions of Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and even some anarchists.

By the end of the Civil War, famine and epidemic had taken hold; the econ-

omy was in ruins. The measure taken during this period, “war communism,” was described by Lenin as “thrust on us by war and ruin. It was not, nor could it be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a temporary measure.”

Direct exchange between town and country was imposed by the requisitioning of grain and direct state distribution of industrial goods under concentrated economic authority and power. Money was eliminated. Although this reaction to circumstances had nothing to do with Marxism, it became an unfortunate source of illusion about the possibility of a rapid and immediate transition to communism.

The abolition of the market was not based on material abundance and a highly developed productive base and advanced forms of democracy and citizen participation but on social disintegration, destroyed production, absolute scarcity and centralized, coercive authority. It wasn’t viable. Everyone had to use the black market, even party members. Stalin in the 1930s would borrow such methods in peacetime, and call it communism.

Ever-smaller revolutionary working class

The Bolsheviks won the Civil War because they were able to mobilize the population, especially the urban proletariat, to defeat the invading armies and the White “contras” of the day. But in the brutal process of breaking their power, much of the revolutionary urban working class was destroyed.

With a return to peace, the urban working class could be reconstituted, drawn from the peasants of the nearby countryside. But how to regenerate revolutionary consciousness in a semi-literate peasantry without class traditions? Without any revolutionary practice, this new urban working class lacked revolutionary politics, and labored under conditions remote from socialist goals.

“War communism,” with forced seizures of grain and militarization of labor, had effectively put an end to democratic workers control at the enterprise level. The newly recruited working class had no say in factory management and no voice in political decision making. The revolutionary momentum was lost, as well as the frontline workers who made the revolution. Had there been elections at that point, the Bolsheviks would likely have lost.

The Bolsheviks were most afraid of being isolated in power. The Left Social Revolutionaries participated in the government with the Bolsheviks from November 1917 until July 1918. However on July 6 the Left SRs began an insurrectional revolt in Moscow, proclaiming their intention to govern alone and to “reopen the war against German imperialism.” They were defeated and from then the Bolsheviks ruled alone.

Marcel Liebman noted, “The Leninists...against their will, concentrated the whole state power in their own hands, with no share held by other socialist parties.” (Marcel Liebman, “Was Lenin a Stalinist?” in Tariq Ali [editor], *The Stalinist Legacy*, Penguin Books, England, 1984, 140)

What Victor Serge would call this “change of mentality” meant that the Bolsheviks moved to suppress their socialist and anarchist opponents, an act with irreversible consequences for the further development of socialist democracy. At the time, it was a defensive move given that the SRs had launched a series of terrorist attacks, killing first V. Voludarsky, then Moisei Uritsky, and had attempted to kill Lenin. Fanya Dora Kaplan, who shot Lenin, said she did it because he was responsible for dispersing the Constituent Assembly.

Soon, however, with the outbreak of Civil War and the threat to the revolution it represented, the Bolsheviks went further, banning political parties and abridging many of the basic liberties that an actually functioning democracy

requires. By 1921 other parties were virtually banned, and officially so by 1924.

Revolution isolated, workers power eroded

The basis of Marx’s understanding of socialism, and in fact the common ideological patrimony of all the socialist forces in Russia—Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and Left SRs—is the vision of a consciously regulated society of freely associated producers.

There was now a fundamental conundrum. The Bolsheviks, as Marxists, understood that there could be no socialism without democracy. Institutions of democratic self-rule were crucial to the rational, equitable reorganization of society with the working-class majority in control of its own destiny.

Leaders like Lenin and Trotsky understood the problem and saw it could only be overcome if the revolution spread to countries where capitalism was developed and workers were closer to being a majority. Lenin often said it was a terrible misfortune that the honor of beginning the world socialist revolution should befall backward Russia, ill-suited to move toward socialism.

The Bolsheviks understood that their revolution was the first, but it belonged to the world. It was part of a global process that couldn’t be limited to Russia. They needed Germany and the West, and knew they couldn’t survive if they were left to themselves, surrounded by reaction. If need be, Lenin later said, Russia would sacrifice its revolution for Germany because it had a better chance of advancing to socialism.

The soviets did not survive the Civil War, except in name. The working class barely existed, the country was exhausted, in crisis, and the leadership faced chaos, circumstances that did not augur well for the democratic self-governance of the working class. With society-wide democracy undermined, the soviets became *de facto* party committees, rubber stamp organs for the

party and later the state, losing their independence and becoming lifeless, largely ceremonial institutions.

The irony (and tragedy) was that the organ of socialist democracy bequeathed to the international working class could not itself survive the aftermath of the Revolution it had been indispensable in bringing about.

The end of inner party democracy

While constricting the play of formal democracy in the population, the Bolsheviks sought to continue it within the party. This too was corroding, as a more or less inevitable result of the curtailment of democracy in the society as a whole. The post-Civil War reality was that the state of siege in the society inevitably found its way into the party, as the Bolsheviks found themselves isolated in Russia itself, and in the world where a postwar revolutionary tide was ebbing.

The war, the internal measures against counter-revolution and famine, the privations of war communism and then the suppression of an early 1921 sailors' revolt at Kronstadt⁴ relegated the commune state to the status of myth. New entrants came into the party without the traditions of the "Old Bolsheviks."

Any significant inner party faction, whether from a radical or conservative direction, that set itself against the Bolshevik majority was seen as representing dissident political forces within the broader polity. Since the Bolsheviks no longer allowed their existence outside the party, they could hardly be tolerated inside the party where they might threaten splits. Even as it adopted a New Economic Policy, making concessions to peasant interests, the party formally banned factions.

Extending the revolution, consequences of failure

If socialist revolution was to be secured in the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, formally established in 1922) or begun to be

realized over the longer run, it had to undertake the socio-economic prerequisites of socialism—at minimum, the industrialization of the economy so as to produce a working-class majority.

Militant workers across the West saw the Russian working class as a model and appropriated this novel, profoundly democratic form of organization, the soviet, as a new tool in the arsenal of class struggle.

Thanks especially to the centrality of the soviets in the Russian Revolution, but also to syndicalist and anarchist-led uprisings in places like Spain, direct democracy was the order of the day, entailing a *critique* of bourgeois electoralism and parliamentarism. Indeed, in the early years of the revolution the Bolsheviks hoped to forge alliances with revolutionary syndicalists and anarchists to serve as partners in overthrowing bourgeois rule.

In the wake of the October Revolution that brought the Russian working class to power, committees and councils appeared in sit-down strikes, general strikes, occupations and insurrections from Glasgow to Belfast, Winnipeg to Seattle, Bavaria to Barcelona. From 1918-1920 revolutionary crises rocked Europe's capitals.

These insurrectionary general strikes, with council power, were inspired by the Russian Revolution and aimed to extend it to Europe, the Americas and beyond. But the German revolution, the Finnish and Hungarian Communes, all the insurrectionary general strikes went down to a series of defeats. In Germany, the main hope, the revolutionary possibility breathed its last in 1923.

The tragedy of the defeated revolutionary insurrections in Europe was that it threw the Russian revolutionary leadership back on its own resources, in domestic circumstances of political isolation that were decreasingly favorable for pushing the revolution forward.

The strangling of soviet democracy, even the suppression of the Kronstadt

rebellion, was hardly on the agenda of the Bolsheviks as they went about securing "all power to the soviets." But as the Bolsheviks adopted emergency authoritarian practices in reaction to the brutality of the Civil War, and afterward to defend the revolution in power, bit by bit they transformed themselves politically and the revolution itself.

In this way they preserved the revolution in the face of reaction and the fear of annihilation, but left it as a dying plant in the eyes of the world, including other revolutionaries. The paradox was that the Bolsheviks used anti-democratic, anti-socialist methods to preserve themselves in power, trusting only themselves among all the political tendencies to be committed to the international revolution, to see the world advance to socialism as their only hope for survival.

But in undermining the democratic and socialist foundations of their own rule, they ended up greatly reducing the attractiveness of their revolution to the world's radical working classes—improving the conditions for the counter-revolution that would be perpetually pursued by the international ruling classes.

The contradictions facing the Bolsheviks in seeking to expand the Russian Revolution—to create the conditions that would ultimately allow them to consolidate working-class rule on a democratic basis—manifested themselves with force and clarity in the one instance where they attempted to provoke a soviet revolution through military intervention abroad.

After turning back a Polish incursion into Russia (conveniently forgotten in conventional historical accounts), Lenin's attempt to march on Warsaw in Poland in 1920, hoping to build a socialist bridge to Germany—where revolutionary ferment was still brewing after the defeat of 1918—turned out to be deeply counterproductive. Lenin's enthusiasm (and impatience) for world revolution led to the Red Army march

to Warsaw, where they imagined Polish workers and peasants would rise up and greet them as liberators.

Instead, a Polish popular army led by Marshall Jozef Pilsudski defeated them at the gates of Warsaw. This had the effect of turning the internationalist Bolsheviks into aggressors, undermining the attractiveness of socialism, and allowing the arch-nationalist Pilsudski to portray himself as the democratic defender of the Polish nation—enhancing the political attractiveness of nationalism.

Trotsky had warned against the march as likely to boost the strength of the Bolsheviks' enemies. The march on Warsaw might possibly have succeeded had Joseph Stalin not disobeyed orders to provide support for Mikhail Nikolayevich Tukhachevsky's exhausted troops who were leading the expedition. But the victory would have been that of the Red Army, not the Polish workers. The lesson was that workers' power could not be imposed from above or from outside.

When the bridge to Germany was lost as was the westward extension of the revolution, the Bolsheviks were caught in a bind. Had they handed over power, say, to a Constituent Assembly to determine the future course of the Russian Revolution, the revolution would have had a brief half-life.

Had they allowed legal forms such as elections, the Bolsheviks sooner rather than later would have been voted out of office. This might have served the cause of revolution by setting a democratic example, demonstrating its overriding commitment to its ideals. But the resulting defeat could have brought a much worse repression than the mass murder of the Paris Communards in 1871, a fate the Bolsheviks knew would have awaited them.

The Bolsheviks' reluctance to share or cede power, in the interests of assisting world revolution—to save the revolution at home—is thus understandable.

As we know, what actually happened under Stalin destroyed not only the majority of the Bolshevik leadership but millions more. With the consolidation of the Soviet bureaucracy under Stalin, the USSR became a more coercive regime.

The Left Opposition from the mid-1920s proposed promoting industrialization to increase the size of the working class, and to create a new generation of revolutionary workers with the habits and education of socialist industry under workers' control, hopefully serving as an inspiration to workers elsewhere—the kind of holding operation that might spur revolutionary opportunities abroad.

Had they been able to hold on with at least a partial model of workers' democracy, they might have secured their best option and prevented Stalin's ascendance to power. Revolution in Germany in the early 1930s or Spain in the middle 1930s could have been possible, saving the Russian revolution and sparing the world from the nightmare to come.

But left on its own, it would have been impossible for the Soviet Union to raise the resources internally without squeezing the population. That couldn't be done democratically. Dictatorship became inevitable, though not one as brutal as Stalin's.

As Evgeny Preobrazhensky had demonstrated in the debates of the 1920s, industrialization could proceed with what he called "socialist primitive accumulation." This would entail unequal exchange between the urban producers and peasants, with overpriced industrial goods going to the peasants and underpriced food and raw materials coming back to the urban working class, and the surplus accruing to the industrial sector, to be used for investment and expansion.

Under whatever terminology, this was a process of exploiting the peasantry, and without aid from more developed countries that had successful socialist revolutions, would ultimately

require the use of authoritarian measures against the peasant—the construction of an ever more coercive regime. No one in those debates, however, could have predicted the wholesale, murderous forced collectivization of agriculture under Stalin in the 1930s, causing millions of peasant deaths by starvation.

The idea of collectivizing agriculture had been to make it advantageous to the peasants and increase agricultural production. The plan, in discussion since 1926, envisioned collectivizing only as much crop area as could be supplied with agricultural machinery. The whole purpose was to industrialize agricultural production providing an attractive alternative to the small, primitive farms of the peasantry. What happened under Stalin—to peasants and workers alike—is the story of a counterrevolution that set back the cause of international socialism for many decades.

Old and new hope

The Russian Revolution was rightly seen as a threat to world capitalism. What could be more dangerous than workers demanding control over their work and their lives? The success of the revolution was greeted with joy or horror around the world—the reaction depending on which side of the class line one stood. For the world's ruling classes, it meant isolating, discrediting and destroying the revolution, lest it spread to their doors.

Despite its tragic fate, the revolution was a transcendent historic event. It advanced the democratic ideals of the French Revolution for liberty, equality, and fraternity and sought to extend them by deepening democracy into the realm of the social economy, with the goal of ending exploitation, abolishing wage-labor, dismantling hierarchy, and endowing workers with the ability to democratically plan (and implement) what was to be produced.

So long as the revolution could succeed with some autonomy, it could inspire greater support both at home

and abroad. The world's leading capitalist regimes redoubled their efforts to destroy its inner life and dynamism, leaving it to decay of its own accord, even as they sustained permanent pressure on it from outside.

With the regime's consolidation, Stalin's nationalized economy and bureaucratic authoritarian rule served the interests of both world capitalism and the bureaucracy by linking socialism to dictatorship. Meanwhile, workers fighting for socialism in the West were co-opted, isolated or repressed. Henceforth democracy was equated with capitalist property relations and called "freedom," while socialism became identified with stultifying bureaucracy, dictatorship, lack of liberty and terror.

The Cold War came to instantiate this symbiosis of capitalist democracy and Stalinist dictatorship—beneficial and functional for each of its contestants, both of whom had a vested interest in labeling the Soviet system as Marx's vision of communism. From 1917 until 1991, the period of existence of the Soviet Union, the October Revolution was relentlessly attacked, denounced, and distorted beyond recognition in the West.

Within the Soviet Union and its bloc, the key was to prevent any form of democratic challenge to the statist economic *status quo*, in effect to promote the soviet version of neoliberal capitalism's TINA ("There is No Alternative,") the bureaucratic authoritarian anti-democratic form they called Communism, tightly controlled from above. Both sides in the Cold War promoted the Stalinized version of "communism" as the goal of the October Revolution of 1917. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, world capital treated the Soviet experience as an irrelevance, a bracket in history soon to be forgotten.

Ironically, to counteract and preclude the "soviet threat," Western capitalist regimes conceded to social democratic reforms fought for by organized labor—often socialists in the labor movement. Important elements of a more advanced political democracy such as universal franchise, representative democracy, free speech and other basic rights were won and allowed in order to contain radicalism at home.

So long as these concessions did not threaten capitalist profits they could be accommodated. It wasn't until the presidential candidacy of Bernie Sanders that the word "socialism" would be attractive to a majority of Millennials, born after the redbaiting of the Cold War lost its efficacy. That a social democrat calling himself a democratic socialist could win the hearts and votes of so many millions in the heart of capitalism shows that the equation of socialism with anti-democratic statist dictatorship is no longer functional.

Fortunately the disintegration and demise of the Soviet Union, followed by the ravages of neoliberal capitalism have combined to open the way to reclaim democracy as the heart of the socialist project. If it isn't democratic, it isn't socialism.

Thanks to Robert Brenner for incisive comments.

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—Solidarity, May/June, 2017

<https://www.solidarity-us.org/node/4975>

1 Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution held that Russian capitalism was so backward, its capitalist class so weak and immature that it was incapable of introducing bourgeois democratic reforms. That job would fall to the working class in power. The revolution could not

stop halfway and would be impelled to move toward socialist goals.

2 The program called for workers' rule with "right to elect and recall functionaries; nationalization of banks, trusts, cartels;" confiscation of the land to be turned over to the peasants organized in soviets; and a "workers peace directed against all the capitalists."

3 The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a peace treaty signed on 3 March 1918 between the new Bolshevik government of Soviet Russia and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire), that ended Russia's participation in World War I.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Brest-Litovsk

4 In March 1921, an anarchist-led sailors' revolt erupted at the crucial Kronstadt naval base under the slogan "soviets without Bolsheviks." It was a particularly wrenching episode in view of the revolutionary legacy of Kronstadt during the events of 1905 and 1917. The underlying cause was the disastrous effects of war communism on the Russian peasantry from which the Kronstadt garrison largely came. The revolt hastened the abandonment of war communism, but the bloody suppression of the revolt and the brutal aftermath has echoed in debates ever since. The definitive sympathetic historical account is *Kronstadt 1921* by Paul Avrich. See also Victor Serge, "Once More: Kronstadt," April 1938,

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1938/04/kronstadt.htm>

Sources:

Sources include Victor Serge, Leon Trotsky, V.I. Lenin, Evgeny Preobrazhensky. The following is a very brief, selected list of readings.

Isaac Deutscher: The Prophet Armed; The Prophet Unarmed; The Prophet Outcast (three-volume political biography of Leon Trotsky.)

Samuel Farber: Before Stalinism. The Rise and Fall of Soviet Democracy (1990).

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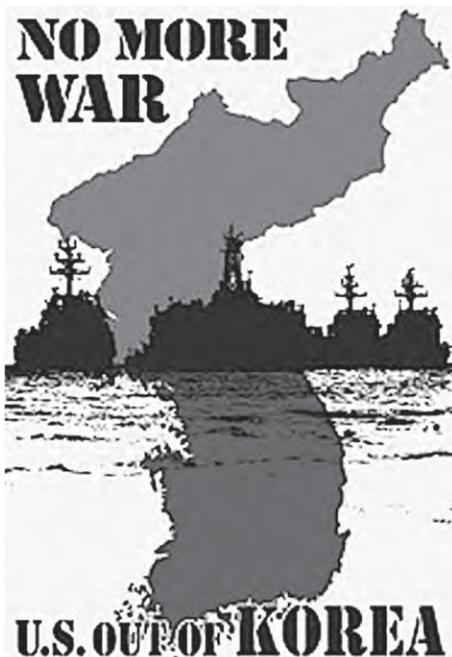
Defend North Korea!

U.S. threatens North Korea with annihilation

BY CHRIS KINDER

The unhinged and perhaps pathological president of the United States has threatened North Korea with “Fire and Fury” such as “the world has never seen.” Such a direct threat of using obliterating force by a head of state is virtually unheard of, and has been condemned world-wide. But this imperialist idiot, Trump, says he is ready to take the world to nuclear winter over what amounts to little more than an insult.

The North Korean people—in fact Koreans generally—have already seen what a threat of annihilation from the U.S. might mean, because they lived through it. In the U.S. war on Korea, 1950-53, almost every substantial building in the North was destroyed, and cities and villages were reduced to rubble. People were forced to live underground! One million Chinese soldiers had to die to free Korea from this genocidal assault; with the Chinese having just achieved victory in their own war for liberation from capitalist imperialism, with the establishment of the Chinese (deformed) workers state in 1949.



After the end of World War II, the U.S. had imposed a military-puppet regime in the south of Korea using elements from the former Japanese imperialists, who had ruled Korea since 1910; while the Soviet Red Army meanwhile had liberated northern Korea. Thus, Korea ended up being divided at the 38th parallel.

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Now, the North Koreans want a peace treaty finally ending this outrageous war—the Korean War was halted in an armistice, not a peace treaty—and a guarantee that the U.S. won’t invade again. With that, I think they would be satisfied. The North Korean government has been willing in the past to give up its nuclear capability development in exchange for some semblance of peace, but this semi-reconciliation agreement was dumped under Bush the lesser, hitherto known as the “worst president” of the U.S. (I think he’s been displaced in that.)

And while the DPRK (North Korea) under Kim Jong-Un will not give up its hard won nuclear deterrent—nor should they—they will no doubt agree to some form of peaceful coexistence. But the aggressor in chief—the U.S.

under Trump/Pence—seeks “regime change” and world domination, not peace, and therein lies the problem.

The North, while ramping up its nuclear and missile capacity in its own defense in recent years, has forsworn any intention of a first strike, unlike the U.S., which has never done so. And diplomacy? Trump wouldn’t know what diplomacy was if it ran him over in one of his casino parking lots.

Both Secretary of State Tillerson, late of Exxon, and the uncompromising “mad dog” Mattis, of Defense, are looking more like the adults in the room compared to Trump’s insecure brat routine. Perhaps this bodes well for Trump’s imminent departure, which would be good as far as it goes, but nowhere near enough. The left’s focus on “dump Trump” leaves a lot of needed change off the table.

North Korea and South Korea are of course one country. Both southerners and northerners are more interested in reuniting families and in national reunification than they are with a new war, which they see as something between the U.S. and the North. But the reactionary U.S. regime could care less about that, or about the millions of casualties that would result from a nuclear war with North Korea.

The U.S. under both Republicans and Democrats insists on annual “war games” and mobilizations of troops in the region and right on the border between the Koreas, as well as stationing thousands of troops there year round. Russian and Chinese troops, meanwhile, have been off the Korean peninsula for decades. Ending these annual U.S. mobilizations is another, very reasonable, North Korean demand. But for Trump, giving in on anything might mean to him that he’s

a loser—which he is of course—but the world might have to pay a heavy price in proving that.

U.S. imperialism is now bent on an “Asian pivot,” started under Obama, which is intended to surround and contain China. This now includes the stationing of three-quarters of the U.S. naval fleet in the region. This “pivot” is just another example of the U.S. trying to rule the world. In this context of isolating China, North Korea is a bit of a distraction. The North Koreans are just trying to avoid another devastation of their country such as happened in the 1950s. But to Trump, any defiance of his imperial will is an abomination.

Both China and the DPRK are workers states, which are deformed by bureaucratic ruling castes: they have working-class state planning and economic control, but are dominated by bureaucrats instead of democratic workers councils (soviets), such as emerged in the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless, their state economies have produced remarkable results. China, while burdened with capitalist parasites who were invited in under Deng Xiaoping’s “capitalist road” strategy, is now a highly developed world power. The DPRK meanwhile survived both the U.S. attempt at obliteration in the 1950s and the mass starvation that ensued after the collapse of the Soviet Union; and now has grown remarkably.

Both China and the DPRK must be defended against the attacks of the imperialist U.S., which seeks to impose its capitalist domination and perhaps nuclear Armageddon on the world. The only permanent solution to capitalist/imperialist war and exploitation is workers revolution to establish a socialist future for humanity world-wide.

Shameful Silence

Where is the outrage over the slaughter of civilians in Mosul?

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

The catastrophic number of civilian casualties in Mosul is receiving little attention internationally from politicians and journalists. This is in sharp contrast to the outrage expressed worldwide over the bombardment of east Aleppo by Syrian government and Russian forces at the end of 2016.

Hoshyar Zebari, the Kurdish leader and former Iraqi finance and foreign minister, told me in an interview last week: “Kurdish intelligence believes that over 40,000 civilians have been killed as a result of massive firepower used against them, especially by the Federal Police, air strikes and ISIS itself.”

The real number of dead who are buried under the mounds of rubble in west Mosul is unknown, but their numbers are likely to be in the tens-of-thousands, rather than the much lower estimates previously given.

People have difficulty understanding why the loss of life in Mosul was so huge. A good neutral explanation of this appears in a meticulous but horrifying report by *Amnesty International* (AI) called “At Any Cost: The Civilian Catastrophe in West Mosul.”

It does not give an exact figure for the number of dead, but otherwise it confirms many of the points made by Mr. Zebari, notably the appalling damage inflicted by continuing artillery and rocket fire aimed over a five-month period at a confined area jam-packed with civilians who were unable to escape.

However, even this does not quite explain the mass slaughter that took place. Terrible civilian casualties have occurred in many sieges over the centuries, but in one important respect the siege of Mosul is different from the others. ISIS, the cruelest and most violent movement in the world, was determined not to give up its human shields.

Even before the attack by Iraqi government forces, aided by the U.S.-led coalition, started on October 17 last year, ISIS was herding civilians back into the city and not allowing them to escape to safety. Survivors who made their way to camps for displaced people outside Mosul said they had to run the gauntlet of ISIS snipers, booby traps and mines.

Determined to hang on to its hundreds-of-thousands of human shields, ISIS packed them into a smaller and smaller space as pro-government forces advanced. ISIS patrols said they would kill anybody who left their houses; they welded shut metal doors to keep them in, and hanged people who tried to escape from electricity pylons and left the bodies to rot.

“Consequently, as IS lost territory during the course of the battle, IS-controlled areas became increasingly crowded with civilians,” says the AI report. “Mosul residents routinely described to Amnesty International how they sheltered in homes with relatives or neighbors in groups of between 15-100.”

It was these groups that became the victims of the massed firepower of pro-government forces. In many streets, every house is destroyed and I could not even enter some badly damaged districts because access was blocked by smashed masonry, craters and burned out cars.

Outside Mosul, people tend to assume that most of this destruction was the result of airstrikes—and much of it was—but Mr. Zebari is correct in saying that it was shell and rocket fire from pro-government ground forces, particularly by the Federal Police, that caused the greatest destruction and loss of civilian life.

How this happened is easily explained by a look at the types of ordinance used by pro-government forces: these include 122mm and 155mm howitzers, but also notoriously inaccurate 122mm Grad rockets and locally made Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions (IRAMs) that might land almost anywhere.

The Grad is a Soviet weapon that dates back fifty years, and consists of 40 rockets mounted in a vehicle, which can be fired in volleys over a half minute period. Earlier versions of this weapon had a devastating effect on dug-in German infantry in fortified positions in World War II. Civilians crammed together in fragile houses in west Mosul would stand little chance.

The U.S.-dominated coalition said that it tried to avoid carrying out air strikes where civilians were present, and

its planes dropped leaflets telling them to move away from ISIS positions. People on the ground in Mosul regarded this as a cruel joke, because they had nowhere else to go to and ISIS would shoot them if they tried to run away.

In addition, the ISIS system of defense was based on quickly moving its fighters from building to building through holes cut in the walls in the newer parts of Mosul; meanwhile in the Old City, where most houses have cellars, ISIS linked these by tunnels so they could fire and retreat before the building they were in was destroyed, most commonly by 500-pound bombs.

“There were very few Daesh [ISIS] in our neighborhood, but they dropped a lot of bombs on them,” Qais, 47, a resident of Mosul al-Jadida district told me. He reckoned that between 600 and 1,000 people in the district had been

killed, and he showed me pictures on his phone of a house that had once stood beside his own but had been reduced to a heap of smashed-up bricks.

“There were no Daesh in the house,” he said. “But there were seven members of the Abu Imad family there, of whom five were killed along with two passersby.”

A further reason for the devastation caused by the battle for west Mosul was the outcome of the fighting for east Mosul between October 17 and January 24. The Iraqi government and the Americans had expected a hard fought but relatively swift victory, perhaps taking about two months to

seize the whole of the city (in fact, it took nine months.)

The attack on the part to the east of the Tigris River was primarily undertaken by the highly trained and experienced Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), fighting house-to-house. Air strikes were usually against carefully selected targets, and not called in at will by ground troops at the first sign of resistance.

These tactics of the pro-government forces did not work. True, they eventually captured east Mosul after three months of heavy fighting and at the cost of casualties to the CTS reported as being between 40 and 50 percent. But they could not afford this scale of losses repeated in west Mosul, where ISIS was even more deeply entrenched.

When the assault on west Mosul began on February 19, the pro-government forces were therefore using artillery, rockets and airpower much more freely. And in addition to the CTS, they fielded the Federal Police and Emergency Response Division, both of which were far less well-trained, and deemed more sectarian than the CTS. As they in turn suffered heavy casualties, they lost all restraint in use of their firepower.

Why has there not been more outcries over the destruction of west Mosul? There should be no question about the massive civilian loss of life, even if there are differences over the exact numbers of the dead.

The biggest reason for the lack of outrage is that ISIS was seen as a uniquely evil movement that had to be defeated—whatever the cost in dead bodies to the people of Mosul.

It is an understandable argument, but one that in the past has meant Iraq never finds peace.

—CounterPunch, July 24, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/07/24/a-shameful-silence-where-is-the-outrage-over-the-slaughter-of-civilians-in-mosul/>

... and the Wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones ...
But those were Foreign Children and it really didn't matter."



Actual Dr. Seuss cartoon from 1941 criticizing America's policy on denying European Jews safe-haven during the Holocaust. Note the slogan on the Mother's shirt.

Hurricane Harvey and the *Dialectics of Nature*

BY LOUIS PROYECT

Between 1872 and 1882, Frederick Engels worked on a book titled *The Dialectics of Nature* that sought to apply Marxist dialectics to the natural world. Although it was never completed and is filled with dated ideas about science, it is a work that has earned the respect of some of the most important scientists on the left such as Stephen Jay Gould who praised its best known chapter that was issued separately as a pamphlet—*The Part played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man*. Long before people such as Barry Commoner and Rachel Carson were laying the groundwork for the eco-socialism of today, Engels anticipated the kind of contradictions that have led to three disastrous hurricanes: Katrina, Sandy and now Harvey. Engels wrote:

“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centers and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries.”

If you understand that the prairies surrounding Houston, the wetlands to the south of New Orleans and the brush that grew across the coastline around greater New York were closely related to the forests of the earliest class societies that Engels refers to, you will realize that “each victory” will bring us closer to the ultimate defeat of civilization itself. Just consider the words that follow those above:

“When the Italians of the Alps used up the pine forests on the southern slopes, so carefully cherished on the northern slopes, they had no inkling that by doing so they were cutting at the roots of the dairy industry in their region; they had still less inkling that they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, and making it possible for them to pour still more furious torrents on the plains during the rainy seasons.”

Furious torrents. Are there any words better matched to the pictures of Houston seen on television every night?

Now poised to get the second battering since Katrina as Harvey plows ahead, New Orleans was a victim of its own success—at least measured in capitalist terms. The city was founded in 1718 on a natural ridge of high land as recounted in an article titled “Louisiana’s Wetlands: a Lesson in Nature Appreciation” on the *Environmental Health Perspectives (EHP)* website. Even before capitalist development began the inexorable process of what Engels referred to as “victories over nature,” flooding was a problem. Settlers built levees along the Mississippi River up to 165 miles north of the city just to keep the river tamed.

To stave off yellow fever epidemics, the city government drained the swamps whose mosquitos had killed 40,000 residents between 1817 and 1905. This was in effect robbing Peter to pay Paul since it was such “wilderness” that protected the city from flooding as well. This was long before environmental science had begun to warn about the consequences of removing natural barriers. The city’s elite only saw the upside of allowing suburbs to be built all around the city rather than “wasteful” swampland.

As more and more levees were built along the Mississippi, the same unforeseen consequences took their toll as the blockage of water accelerated the demise of the wetlands to the city’s south. Additionally, the nutria took their toll. These large rodents that were originally imported into Louisiana for their use in fur coats were able to escape from their pens and began to eat away the wetland’s vegetation in the same way that the nonnative lamprey eels devastated the Great Lakes.

The job that was begun by killing mosquitos and by marauding nutrias was completed by the oil companies that dredged canals throughout the wetlands for drilling opportunities. The saltwater they allowed to seep-in helped to kill vegetation. A shipping channel used by the oil companies that connected the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River served as funnel for Katrina’s storm surge, according to the *EHP* website. But why should that bother the captains of industry who saw New Orleans mainly as a port from which oil and soybeans could be exported? The poor African-Americans who were displaced from New Orleans could always go somewhere else. Indeed, many went to Houston where a double whammy now forces them to migrate once again.

Like New Orleans, New York City was a major seaport. And also like New Orleans, it was subject to natural disasters for the same reason it was so successful commercially. It is what geographers call a “bight,” a curve in the coastline that provides a natural inlet for ships. When Hurricane Sandy slammed into the bight, the water had no place else to go except into the streets closest to the river. This included the financial district that constitutes the nerve center of American capitalism. That Goldman-Sachs has supplied

so many of Donald Trump's cadre as he plunges recklessly into fostering the exact conditions that created Hurricane Sandy is just another example of Engels's "victory over nature."

Many of the people who worked on Wall Street commuted from Staten Island and the Rockaways. Like the poor and working class in New Orleans, they also took a hit but probably not as severe.

Developers built over 2,700 homes on Staten Island between 1980 and 2008, much of it on marshland along the island's Atlantic-facing south shore. Twenty-one people living in these houses were drowned by Sandy's flood. Like the yahoo city officials in Houston, the "enlightened" liberal leadership of New York City permitted such houses to be built even though climate scientists warned about the risks.

The Rockaways was another victim of capitalist development. In a video I made a few weeks after Sandy struck the Queens peninsula, I explained how its saturation by middle and upper class housing destroyed natural barriers to flooding. Like the Jersey Shore, it had become a warren of amusement parks, boardwalks and other lures for inner-city residents in the 1930s who could not yet afford Miami Beach. To make this all possible, the marshlands had to disappear. While the middle-class suffered from the flooding, including some people I filmed right next to the Atlantic Ocean, it was mostly the Rockaway poor that suffered most. The housing projects that Robert Moses built there became a Siberia where Blacks and Latinos could be quarantined as part of his overall "urban removal" strategy. When the electricity went out in these high-rises, the old and the frail lacked water, food and other necessities.

But it is in Houston where the victory over nature is most complete and also where nature takes its ultimate revenge.

As was the case in New Orleans, there were warnings about the poten-

tial catastrophe that awaited Houston. On March 3rd, 2016, *Pro Publica* published an article titled "Hell and High Water" whose first sentence read, "It is not if, but when Houston's perfect storm will hit."

Although not nearly as well-known as Katrina or Sandy, Houston had been clobbered by Hurricane Ike on Sept. 11, 2008. It resulted in \$30 billion in damages and cost the lives of 74 people. But the city had not borne the full brunt of Ike that had veered away at the last minute. However, if it had hit the bulls-eye of the city, it would "kill America's economy," according to Pete Olson, a Republican congressman from Sugar Land, a Houston suburb.

The article predicted how such a devastating economic hit could take place. It would first of all deal a major blow to the oil and chemical industries that would affect supply chains across the USA and the world. As it turns out, that is happening right now as one-fifth of America's oil output has been shut down. At the risk of sounding morbid, maybe this will have the beneficial and certainly unintended effect of helping the Venezuelan economy to recover.

While the article is useful as background in pinpointing the shortsightedness of the city's elite, its answer to the problem lies much more in building super-dikes rather than in analyzing how the city became so vulnerable to flooding. For that you need to look at the same issues that condemned New Orleans, Staten Island and the Rockaways to ruin.

Houston, like the other regions, had "developed" real estate on top of what was viewed as empty and useless prairies ringing the city in order to build the sterile tract housing that I used to see from my car when I traveled around the city in the 1970s when I was in the Socialist Workers Party. The prairies, like the marshes in New Orleans and New York, absorbed the rainwater that has now turned Harris County into

something approximating Lake Michigan. The Katy Prairie is only one-fourth of what it was before the real estate developers cashed in. Like Robert Moses, the state's planners built expressways that made it easy for suburban Houstonites to commute to downtown jobs. In the eyes of capitalist politicians, this is what progress amounts to.

There is a nonprofit called the Katy Conservancy, but its website gives hints about its ineffectiveness. When you click a link for the history of Katy Prairie, you get a message that the page cannot be found. Maybe the fact that Hardy Murchison serves on the advisory board is a signal that it pulls its punches. Murchison is the CEO of Encino Energy, a corporation focused on shale oil extraction—just the sort of man you need to help lead a conservation crusade.

Another advisory board member is Roger A. Soape, whose company describes itself as involved with various projects including Bridgeland. What is Bridgeland, you ask? It is a proposed 11,400-acre gated community development in Northwest Houston just like the kind that is gobbling up the prairie-land surrounding the city. It has the temerity to name one of its faux "villages" Prairieland Village. You can't make this shit up.

To conclude, let me return to Frederick Engels's uncompleted *Dialectics of Nature*, which except for the chapter I cited above is largely neglected. I would argue that this was not an effort made in vain. Socialist scholars of the 21st century might consider writing an updated version that provides a unified field theory for society and nature that are so often compartmentalized as separate topics of investigation.

Isn't there an artificial distinction between society and nature? Since scholars and philosophers of the left tend to be anthropocentric, they see

Marxism as a tool to understand society but isn't society merely a component of the natural world?

When you were a kid, you might have had one of those ant colonies where you could watch the tiny creatures interacting with the sand and the food you give them. What is the difference between a worker ant and a factory worker? They are both subsumed within their natural world and all are subsumed within the universe itself that is made up of colliding atoms.

In his introduction, Engels writes:

“Thus we have once again returned to the point of view of the great founders of Greek philosophy, the view that the whole of nature, from the smallest element to the greatest, Member of Protista (Vorticella) from grains of sand to suns, from Protista to men, has its existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in un-resting motion and change, only with the essential difference that what for the Greeks was a brilliant intuition, is in our case the result of strictly scientific research in accordance with experience, and hence also it emerges in a much more definite and clear form.”

Wouldn't a unified field theory of eco-socialism place the whole of nature—including Homo sapiens—into a framework in which the consequences of capitalist development can be seen with the greatest clarity? In some ways, climate change has made this inevitable since it has created the floods that have devastated New Orleans, New York and Houston while at the same time creating the drought in Syria that helped to trigger a catastrophic civil war that may be coming to a sad and pointless conclusion.

Ironically, one of the few Marxists who came closest to unifying society and nature conceptually was in prison at the time and subsequently executed after a show trial found him guilty of “anti-Soviet” behavior.

In *Philosophical Arabesques*, Nikolai Bukharin anticipated Stephen Jay Gould's notion of “punctuated equilibrium,” long before the Marxist paleontologist considered it:

“The dialectical interpretation of development thus includes both gradualness and leaps, in their transition from one into another and in their unity. The real historical process, whether in nature or in society, presupposes both gradualness and leaps, and Saint-Simon already divided epochs into ‘organic’ and ‘critical.’ Is it really the case that the history of the earth, its geological history, has been without catastrophes, ice ages, earthquakes, ‘inundations,’ the disappearance of dry land beneath the sea, the vanishing of water, and so forth? Is it true that the universe does not know the collision of planets and stars with one another? Has human society not witnessed the downfall of whole civilizations? Has it not known wars and revolutions? Of course, we look closely at Darwin's theory of natural selection. Does it, despite the gradualness of evolution, really exclude leaps? Let us take the appearance of the adap-

tive feature, the concrete peculiarity, which selection ‘seizes upon.’ This peculiarity appears ‘by chance;’ Darwin's law is a law of selection, necessity that includes fortuity. But how does it occur, the appearance of such a feature? As a mutation, that is, a leap. Furthermore, the process of selection includes struggle. When, for example, a war between ants takes place, and one ant colony destroys another, is this not a leap? And so on to infinity.”

Let's hope that we are not facing a war between nations today that will have the same disastrous result as it would with ant colonies. Unlike ants, we have the gift of reason that ants lack. Our future is not dictated by nature's iron laws but by our ability to understand and change nature on the path to preserving it and ourselves. But unless we begin to forge an effective political instrument, all hope is lost.

—CounterPunch, September 1, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/09/01/hurricane-harvey-and-the-dialectics-of-nature/>



Eighty Pairs of Shoes

Exhibition highlighting the search for Mexico's missing is currently in Europe

BY MEXICO NEWS DAILY

"I, Margarito Ramírez, am looking for my son whose name is Carlos Iván Ramírez Villareal," reads the green-colored imprint of a shoe's sole on a plain sheet of white paper.

"He is a student at the teachers' college in Ayotzinapa. Police disappeared him with 42 of his classmates in Iguala, Guerrero, on September 26, 2014," the message continues, etched onto the sole of its matching pair.

The message is just one of many in an exhibition currently touring Europe that highlights the plight of thousands of missing people in Mexico and the long quest of their family members to find them.

Called "*Huellas de la Memoria*" (Footprints of Memory), the exhibition is made up of 80 pairs of shoes donated by family members of some of the more than 32,000 people who have been victims of enforced disappearances in Mexico.

It has already visited England, France and Italy and opens today in Berlin, Germany.

The shoes are not just symbolic of those who are missing but also of all the paths that their family members have traveled while searching for them and of their efforts to learn what happened.

Each shoe has a message written on the sole and is a different color depending on whether the person it belonged to is missing (green), was found dead (black) or was murdered during the process of looking for them (red).

Letters demanding justice and naming those who family members believe are responsible for the disappearances accompany each pair of shoes.

The exhibition highlights missing persons cases dating back to the first documented enforced disappearance in the wake of the student massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968 and more recent ones.

Exhibition curator Alfredo López Casanova says the project focuses on what the words "walk and search" mean to the family members of those who are missing and explains that the aim of the project is to build a collective memory about the disappearances, condemn those responsible and to raise awareness about the situation.

"It's very urgent that the world knows what's happening in Mexico, where there is a normalization of violence and it seems common for clandestine graves to appear. The exhibition is a window into terror."

The terror doesn't only affect Mexicans.

Disappearances of migrants—many of them from Central America—are also commonplace as they travel through Mexico to the United States, fleeing from poverty and gang violence.

Honduran woman, Ana Enamorado, has been looking for her son, Óscar Antonio, for the past seven-and-a-half years, since he disappeared in Jalisco in 2010.

She left everything behind in her native Honduras to come to Mexico to search for him and along the way met many others with the same seemingly simple yet virtually impossible objective: walk, search and find.

Together with other mothers she formed the Central American Migrant Movement and dedicates her life to continuing the search for her son and other missing migrants as well as seeking justice.

Enamorado claims that her fruitless search has not been helped by Mexican authorities who, she says, "don't understand that migrating is not a crime and violate [migrants'] human rights."

"In Mexico authorities and organized crime see a migrant as an object, as goods [or] a gold mine that the pol-

leros [people smugglers] hand over to crime rather than cross them into the United States."

When asked about what the word "search" means to her she said, "Searching for a family member without knowing where or how to find them is like looking for a needle in a haystack. We don't know if we are really going to find them or if they are [already] in graves. It's very exhausting."

She believes that the "*Huellas de la Memoria*" exhibition will serve as a way of further highlighting to the government that there are thousands of missing Central American migrants in Mexico.

Another case highlighted in the exhibition is that of Guadalupe Pérez Rodríguez whose father went missing from the Sierra Norte of Puebla in 1990 when he was just six years old.

In his native Totonaco language the concept of the disappearance of a person doesn't exist but it is one that has been imposed on him for virtually his whole life.

For 27 years, Guadalupe has not given up the search for his father.

He also complains of inaction and lack of will on the part of authorities.

The idea for the project came out of a 2013 protest march of mothers who were searching for their children.

The exhibition, which aims to sow an antidote to oblivion and silence and be an echo of the voices of family members who have long fought for and sought justice and truth, was first shown in Mexico last year.

—Mexico News Daily, July 4, 2017

<http://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/80-pairs-of-shoes-tell-story-of-searchers-plight/>

Trump Versus the Venezuelan Revolution

BY SHAMUS COOKE

Trump's threats against Venezuela escalated recently from the economic to the military: after announcing sanctions he threatened that all military options were "on the table." Trump's actions were perfectly timed to lend support to the U.S.-backed opposition in Venezuela, whose ongoing violent rebellion aims to topple the government of democratically elected President Nicolas Maduro.

The apex of violence was focused on stopping the recent elections to the National Constituent Assembly (ANC), convened by President Maduro to rewrite Venezuela's constitution with the goal of resolving the current social-economic crisis.

The ANC was tasked to become the most powerful governmental body while in session. Part of Maduro's motivation in convening the ANC was to break the political deadlock that started when the U.S.-backed opposition gained control of the Venezuelan parliament, the National Assembly.

The wealthy opposition promised to prevent the ANC elections from taking place, while Trump promised economic sanctions if the ANC election wasn't cancelled. The other usual suspects of Latin American counter-revolution also condemned the ANC elections: Spain, the Vatican, and the Organization of American States (OAS) were among other governmental and western NGOs that denounced the ANC, since they recognized that the U.S.-backed opposition would be deflated if the ANC were successful.

The western media that condemned the ANC elections has consistently failed to condemn the ongoing street violence by the U.S.-backed opposition, who used attacks on voting centers, roadblocks, economic sabotage and "general strikes" to prevent the election from taking place.

But the elections happened, and the unexpectedly high turnout rattled the nerves of the opposition, who didn't expect the traditional base of Chavismo—the working and poor—would come out by the millions to support a broad diversity of candidates within the Chavismo Left.

The Chavismo base revived, for now

The international media covering the election took zero notice of the enthusiasm from Venezuela's poorest neighborhoods. A U.S. labor delegation that travelled to Venezuela to witness the elections was impressed by the broad participation and long lines at various voting centers in poor neighborhoods. SEIU 1199 Executive Vice President Estela Vasquez made notice of the lack of western media attention:

"One thing that I did think was significant is that I didn't see any international media. No reporters from the *New York Times*, no cameras from *CNN*, no cameras from *Fox Television*, or any other international media...covering the poor working class neighborhoods that are the backbone of this revolutionary process in this country,"

The enthusiasm for the election that Vasquez noticed was echoed by a prominent left critic of Maduro, Stalin Perez Borges, who said:

"July 30 [the election] was also a tsunami within the ranks of Chavismo that propelled even those who are unhappy with the government to participate and send a message to the domestic and international right that we have not yet surrendered to imperialism nor are we willing to kneel before the neoliberal plans that the politicians and economists of the [opposition] have prepared for us...the [election] result has led to a recuperation of confidence as a social force, and

provided a glimpse of the possibility for Chavismo to once again be able to call itself the majority."

Because the opposition boycotted the elections, the ANC consists overwhelmingly of representatives of the left, where there lives a diversity of revolutionary political opinion. A third of the ANC was specifically reserved for representatives of trade unions, communal councils, indigenous groups, farmers, students, and pensioners, all sectors that have been radicalized by their experience under Chavez and by the violent actions of the opposition.

The class basis of the Constituent Assembly—the poor and working class—provides hope that this governmental body can provide real revolutionary initiative to resolve key issues that have been demoralizing the Chavismo ranks while empowering the wealthy opposition.

The ANC will not fix every problem and it will likely not usher in a socialist economy, but radical measures can precipitate a revolutionary dynamic that carries with it a logic of its own. The left in Venezuela is more dynamic than the Stalinist images accorded to it by the western media and U.S. Left.

Ultimately, the very convening of the ANC means that Maduro has moved to the left; and it was this leftward shift that provoked enthusiasm from the Chavismo rank and file. Convening the ANC surprised everyone and carried enormous political risks, especially in the middle of an opposition uprising backed by U.S. imperialism: if the masses did not participate in the elections the government would be exposed as lacking a broad social base, and such a weakness would have been instantly exploited by the Trump-supported opposition. But

Maduro proved that he has a bit of Chavez in him yet, having correctly predicted that the masses would consider the ANC as a revolutionary tool to be used against the oligarchy.

Much of the international left has either not recognized Maduro's shift to the left or not realized its significance. Their error is rooted in a misunderstanding of the Venezuelan revolution, which has always been a contradictory movement rooted in the poorest neighborhoods of Venezuela, yet reflected through a bureaucratic prism at the top; a process that under Chavez retained, at times, a call and responsive dynamic that propelled the base to take action, which, in turn resulted in more pressure on the leadership to move left. Such a fluctuating, complicated phenomenon is difficult to pigeonhole, and requires a more nuanced analysis than the intellectually lazy "pox on both houses" approach that has long-infected the U.S. left.

It's true that there are powerful sections of Maduro's bureaucracy who plan to use the ANC simply to outmaneuver the wealthy opposition and maintain their power and, if possible, to strike a deal with the opposition should the opportunity arise. Such a betrayal would, in effect, mark the end of Chavismo and prepare the ground for total victory of the opposition.

But the victory of the bureaucrats in the ANC isn't a foregone conclusion, as some cynics on the left would have you believe. Maduro doesn't command Chavez's authority; he lacks the charisma and he's been lacking in revolutionary initiative. The divisions within Chavismo's upper layers opens up further opportunities for the impatient ranks that can push the project forward against the will of even the more conservative sections of leadership.

The job of the international left is to highlight the possibilities, amplify the program of the revolutionary wing and to educate people internationally about

what's at stake in order to reduce the interventionist options of Trump's imperialism.

The majority of left analysis regarding the Venezuelan crisis fails at these basic tasks, focusing wasted energy on Maduro's shortcomings while proposing nothing of substance to win the fight in progress. The ranks of Chavismo need concrete solutions not endless denunciations.

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The central question is not whether one is pro-Maduro or pro-opposition, the question is "how do the revolutionary forces resolve the current crisis" and "what strategy should revolutionaries deploy?" Most of the left has nothing to say about these basic questions, while refusing to even discuss the relevance of the Constituent Assembly.

The working class in Venezuela recognizes that their fate depends on the outcome of the current struggle; they are in a fight for their lives and hope to use the Constituent Assembly as a weapon. The slogan "No Volveran" [no to return] remains a revolutionary demand of Chavismo that declares the oligarchy will never return to power. But unless bold action is taken to drive the revolution forward the victory of the opposition is inevitable, and such a

nightmare is currently trying to kick in the front door.

False solutions from the left

The current intensified class fight cannot be wished away, it's based on the material conditions embedded in the economy: the unfulfilled needs of the working poor versus the opposition's demand to retake the state apparatus and privatize public resources. The two sides cannot "make peace" with another round of elections or negotiations, yet this is exactly what many pro-revolution analysts are promoting as "solutions" to the crisis.

One such mistake can be found in the analysis of Carlos Carcione from Marea Socialista, a grouping who until recently was in coalition with the other socialist parties inside of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

The analysis put forward by Carcione contains some important critiques of Maduro's government, but a key error is his "solution" to the crisis, which was put forward at the end of a recent interview:

"...the only democratic road, which cannot be captured by either of the two elites [Maduro's government and the opposition] that are instigating violence, is the struggle to renew the Constitution of 1999."

The demand to "renew the Constitution" is a talking point taken directly from the wealthy opposition. To renew the Constitution means to disband the Constituent Assembly and carry on with the electoral process on its normal timeline, as if a life or death crisis wasn't engulfing the nation that requires revolutionary action now. It's as if Carcione believes that erasing the ANC would be a "pause button" to the conflict.

Such a "demand" will find zero resonance in the Chavismo rank and file; they've voted more in recent decades than any other population in the world, and their voting for the Constituent Assembly was itself a showcase of democracy that Carcione oddly fails to recognize as important or legitimate.

The demand to “renew the Constitution” also fails to acknowledge that the opposition is skillfully using the elections to the National Assembly to retake power and undermine the government, by exacerbating the crisis and talking openly of overthrowing Maduro.

Elections to the National Assembly have become the path to power for the oligarchy, while a more directly democratic path has emerged with the Constituent Assembly elections, an infinitely more representative body than the National Assembly with actual capabilities of taking revolutionary action.

Ultimately one’s attitude towards the situation in Venezuela shouldn’t be decided by legal or so called democratic norms, but by which actions promote the interests of the working class and poor and push the revolution forward.

A similar non-solution to the crisis was put forth by Eva Gollinger, a long-time promoter of Chavismo who has been an increasingly vocal critic of Maduro. Gollinger’s critique of Maduro is often spot on, but her solution falls into the fantasy realm, where both sides realize they’re guilty of excess and thus agree to dampen the rhetoric for the good of the country:

“Voices of moderation need to emerge without fear of being branded traitors or opportunists, as has been happening to anyone publicly criticizing the government or opposition. The opposition leadership and its international backers must immediately condemn all violence....The opposition must accept the legitimacy of President Maduro and his administration and allow him to fulfill his presidential term, which ends in 2019. In return, the parliament should be allowed to assume its full mandate without further obstacles. Fair elections overseen by an independent electoral council should be held within the timeframe stipulated by law instead of being manipulated by political parties or foreign pressure.”

Gollinger certainly has good intentions, but her “solutions” are daydreams that ignore the material interests radicalizing both sides: the ranks of Chavismo need radical solutions to the crisis and the U.S. backed opposition will continue to take radical, right-wing action to regain state power. There hasn’t been a “reasonable middle ground” between these two extremes in decades, if ever, in Venezuela.

The working class of Venezuela does not have moderate demands; they require revolutionary action against their class enemies before the wealthy regains the state power to use against them. Moderate actions cannot attack the drastic inequality that pervades Venezuela to this day.

Revolutions are notoriously absent of moderation. Chavez himself was accused of being an extremist every time he took action against the oligarchy, which earned him the love and respect of the broader population in Venezuela and inspired revolutionary movements across the hemisphere.

Maduro’s moderation is precisely what has demoralized his base and empowered the U.S.-backed opposition. The working class of Venezuela does not have moderate demands; they require revolutionary action against their class enemies before the wealthy regains the state power to use against them. Moderate actions cannot attack the drastic inequality that pervades Venezuela to this day.

The left “demand” to renew the Constitution is a return to a dead end: one of the limitations of Chavismo was the over reliance on a representative democracy, as opposed to direct democracy. The energy of the revolution was funneled into constant electioneering, and the representative system wasn’t representative enough, allowing politicians to be unaccountable to the movement that opened the door to careerism, while the slower moving legislative system allowed the demoralization to creep in.

The Constituent Assembly is a legitimate tool of revolution that can be used or wasted. Wishing for the return of the conditions that precipitated the crisis is an odd “solution.” The opposition chose to boycott the ANC elections because they hoped for a U.S.-backed *coup*. Let their miscalculation be their undoing.

What actions should the Constituent Assembly take?

Instead of warning incessantly of authoritarianism the left should be advocating revolutionary solutions: ones that stem the power of both the oligarchy and Chavismo upper-bureaucrats, a “revolution within the revolution.” Divisions among Chavismo’s leadership make such a scenario possible, and it’s desperately needed.

Agitational demands from the Chavismo base in a time of flux can move mountains. Economic solutions that incorporate more socialist policies at the expense of the oligarchy-controlled private sector are also crucial to advancing the revolution, since the capitalists have used their ownership over important economic sectors—like food production—to sabotage the economy.

Some of the below demands have been discussed in different sectors of the Chavismo left, and may find expression in the Constituent Assembly if left groups organize effectively. Ultimately demands that empower the working class at the expense of the oli-

garchy have the potential to inspire the broader population to action, keeping the revolutionary flame lit:

1. Remove the economic power of the oligarchy by nationalizing the sectors of the economy that have been used in economic sabotage, especially food production, the banking sector and international trade.
2. Strategically default on the foreign debt repayments that are bankrupting the nation, so that the money can be used for basic necessities and rebuilding the economy. The high interest debt repayments are shifting billions of dollars from the Venezuelan state into the pockets of rich foreign investors.
3. Fully fund and expand the key victories of Chavismo: education, healthcare, pensions, and housing while increasing the power of localities to administer these programs. Ensure that wages are rising above inflation for all wage-workers. Pay for these initiatives by drastically raising taxes on capital gains, property, inheritance, and other oligarchy-targeted measures.
4. Jail the oligarchs who promote street violence and participate in economic sabotage. A longstanding demand among the Chavismo ranks is to take a firmer hand with an opposition who's grown accustomed to no consequences for violent behavior.
5. Attack corruption of black market dollar profiteering by nationalizing foreign trade.
6. No reconciliation with the oligarchy and their patron, U.S. imperialism. Any "deal" cut by the opposition will be intended to stall the revolutionary process and require economic concessions that come at the expense of the Chavismo base. The opposi-

tion has proven that they will never accept a government they don't directly control. With each new uprising they test the resolve of the government and its popular support, and when this support dissipates a successful *coup*—either militarily or legislative—is inevitable.

7. Use the National Constituent Assembly as a weapon of the revolution by taking the above actions while expanding direct democracy; enshrining increased constitutional power of communal councils, labor unions and other social-political bodies of the Chavismo rank and file to directly exercise state power.

If the ANC doesn't take bold actions soon, the new constitution won't survive the national referendum vote. And if the Chavismo rank and file don't see a pathway to a better, more stable life with the ANC they will abstain, and the U.S.-backed opposition will have an unobstructed path to power.

Another reason the ANC needs to take radical action immediately is the upcoming gubernatorial elections that the opposition plans to participate in. These elections can be easily won by the left if the ANC takes swift action that inspires people to the polls.

Conclusion

Time is short. The ANC gave itself two years to fulfill its mission, but the enthusiasm generated by the election will fade quickly if revolutionary action isn't forthcoming, or if the masses conclude that the new legislative body is content on maintaining the current balance of power instead of smashing it. Maduro's bureaucratic/administrative maneuvers have outlived their usefulness, and projecting this strategy onto the ANC will transfer the disease of demoralization onto an otherwise healthy body.

The several co-occurring crises in Venezuela require a shift of power to the masses at the expense of the capitalists: any action that the ANC takes that promotes this while encouraging the self-activity of the working class will help refresh the cycle of bottom-up activity that flourished under Chavez but has waned under Maduro.

The street violence of the U.S.-backed opposition that has killed over 100 people and included two *coup* attempts will not subside on its own, especially when Trump has prioritized Venezuela for regime change. Successive U.S. presidents have understood the special "threat" to imperialism that Venezuela has posed, even if much of the left doesn't. Defeating Trump requires that Venezuelans move towards socialism, while requiring that socialists in the U.S. actively support this movement.

If the new constitution is a lifeless document it will fail the referendum vote and catapult the opposition into power. However, if the path to the constitution is full of revolutionary action the people will respond enthusiastically, and the broader hemisphere will be re-infected by the revolutionary energy that originally birthed the "pink tide."

But the pink tide politics that eschewed western imperialism and neoliberalism has reached its ideological limits, demanding deep socialist inroads against the capitalists who've frustrated the project. A "red tide" can rejuvenate the revolutionary forces across the hemisphere and easily drown out the recent victories of various counter-revolutions. Venezuela remains the focal point of hemispheric revolution, to be won or lost, supported or ignored.

—CounterPunch, August 14, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/08/14/trump-versus-the-venezuelan-revolution/>

“A Watershed Election”

AN EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN DAVE GILBERT AND LYNN HENDERSON

The following is a friendly correspondence—four letters—between Dave Gilbert, a political prisoner and Lynn Henderson, author of “A Watershed Election for U.S. Imperialism” that appeared in the March/April issue of Socialist Viewpoint, Vol. 17, No. 2.

David Gilbert:

Lynn Henderson’s “A Watershed Election for U.S. Imperialism” is on-point in moving past the various superficial explanations for Trump’s victory. “Watershed” roots the disturbing results in the broader decline of imperialism—with the frustrations born of long term stagnation of the standard of living for the U.S. middle/working class and the slipping ability of the ruling class to provide strategic coherence or convincing justifications. Henderson is right to point both to the many continuities from the Obama administration and to how Trump’s election is a deeply dangerous development.

At the same time, I found the analysis to be too Eurocentric. The large wage benefits concessions to U.S. workers in the 25 years that followed World War II are attributed to the lack of capitalist competition—without mentioning the highly lucrative exploitation of the Global South. The reason given for the decline starting in the late 1960s is that Europe and Japan had recovered from WWII devastation and now provided competition on the world market. That may have been the biggest single economic factor, but the 1960s/1970s challenges from the Global South and within the U.S. were also very important.

Also, I was upset to see “Watershed” rail against austerity programs recently imposed on some European countries, without mentioning the forerunners, going back to about 1980, the far more extensive and lethal austerity programs

imposed on some 70 Global South nations, meaning literal starvation for hundreds-of-millions of people.

Looking at the competitive stresses, Henderson argues that NATO is disintegrating. I’ve seen such predictions periodically since 1968. What the Eurocentric analysis misses is the role of the U.S. military in keeping the Global South open for exploitation by all the imperialist powers. That’s the genius of neocolonialism—a kind of free market imperialism—in that they can avoid going to war over which power has total control over each particular piece. In return for that crucial military function the U.S. gets away with certain otherwise unfair economic advantages.

Sometimes the European powers grumble over that, but it hasn’t yet led to the long-predicted breaking apart. That doesn’t mean that it couldn’t happen. The stresses are real; Trump is making it worse; and, as Henderson points out, the emergence of China as a potential competitor brings in a new factor. But no analysis can be convincing without also accounting for the way the imperial triad of the U.S., Europe, and Japan has worked together to exploit and suppress the peoples of the Global South.

Lynn Henderson:

Dear David Gilbert,

I received a short critique you wrote on my article, “A Watershed Election for U.S. Imperialism.” I also accessed your article “The Context for the Trump Phenomenon,”¹ which I thought was excellent. One major criticism you raised in your critique was the observation that my article was too Eurocentric. I think you raise a legitimate point.

I particularly wanted to put what many concluded was a bizarre and

seemingly inexplicable election in a broader historical and global context that helps make it explainable. How the election was shaped first by the utterly unique era of U.S. global hegemony emerging out of WWII and specifically how the increasing disintegration of that unsustainable hegemony is key to understanding the election and much else that is now unfolding globally. I think you are correct, that including a serious look at how the exploitation of third world countries through imperialism’s ruthless application of austerity policies could have strengthened the article.

I liked your observation on how the “U.S. military played an essential role in keeping the Third World open for the exploitation that is absolutely necessary for all the imperialist powers. That’s part of the genius of post-WWII neocolonialism in that they don’t have to go to war over who controls each particular piece, but it’s more of a free market imperialism.” But that post-WWII era has come to an end.

It’s hard to see how “free market imperialism” remains feasible except under the entirely unusual and historically unsustainable period of U.S. global hegemony emerging from WWII. “Free market imperialism” could not indefinitely, or even for very long, suspend capitalism’s inherent drive to ruthless international competition.

China for example, through its aggressive expansion of trade and investment, is now dramatically increasing its penetration of the Third World, especially Africa, and South East Asia. I don’t think it intends to rely on the U.S. military to keep these markets open for it, or to submit to the more “gentlemanly” rules of “free market imperialism.” While China may be a particularly obvious example, the

same new dynamic (unraveling of free market imperialism) holds true for the major European economies.

All of this does not negate the fact the U.S. capitalism continues to be the largest economy in the world with all that implies. But that does not mean it can continue to wield the kind of hegemonic power it did during that last half-century. It continues to be the world's completely dominant military power, and will probably continue to be for the foreseeable future. But massive military power by itself, especially in the era of nuclear weapons, has its limitations.

The most dominant military in the world (and perhaps ever in the world) gained from its long Vietnam War nothing but a humiliating defeat—plus a forced end of the draft army and its replacement with a crushingly expensive all volunteer force that is proving too numerically small to meet its imperialist needs. Its long war in the Middle East is an even more sweeping disaster. Hardly a reassuring record for European powers looking to the U.S. military to guarantee their continued neocolonial access.

The closing of the post-WWII era of U.S. global hegemony means not only an end of “free market imperialism,” but an unraveling process for a whole series of international institutions, which were created by and utterly dominated by U.S. imperialism—among these is NATO. NATO as any kind of unified bloc, especially any kind of unified bloc following U.S. imperialism's direction and lead, is undergoing an irreversible process of disintegrating.

The unraveling of these post-WWII international institutions certainly reflects an increasingly more difficult global environment for U.S. imperialism. But even more immediately frightening for U.S. capitalism is the massive political damage inflicted on its dual political parties. For the ruling elite of

U.S. capitalism there has been no more essential and valuable political institution than its stable two party monopoly. The painful ending of an almost century-long era of U.S. global domination has thrown their formerly reliable two party system and its political actors into complete disarray and confusion. That was reflected in the election itself and the subsequent bizarre functioning of the government since.

David Gilbert:

You're right that part of the current decline of U.S. hegemony is an erosion toward a possible breakdown of that post-WWII “free market imperialism.” Trump's impulsive, erratic personality could accelerate that, although that's probably part of the reason more sober sectors of the ruling class are trying to rein him in. Still, I think any near term major breach with Europe or Japan is unlikely. The most direct threat to the old *modus operandi*, as you raise in your letter, is China. And you're right that they certainly don't rely on the U.S. military. China and the potential for them to put together some kind of a bloc—whether BRICS or the Shanghai cooperation group—means a re-emergence of competition to the dominant imperial triad.

Your letter also points to the inability, since Vietnam, of the U.S. military juggernaut to win wars in the Global South. I would add that (as Amilcar Cabral explained back around 1970,) imperialism has a fall back for when it can't impose a stable comprador regime: catapulting the recalcitrant country into total chaos. They've done that with absolutely horrendous human costs throughout the Middle East and Africa. (They don't even have the decency, when discussing terrorism emanating from Libya, to acknowledge how they destroyed that society, at horrible human costs.) In any case, you and I agree that this situation is one of the pernicious symptoms of the decline of imperialism.

The reality of China emerging as a competitor (even though I've felt that to be less fulsomely imminent than many Left analysts projected) raises another question for analysis: what's behind the current frenzy against Russia? My first take was that it was the most convenient cudgel for the large sectors of the ruling class who wanted to rein-in this loose cannon president. But in addition, confronting and reducing Russia as a power seems to be a high priority in its own right, even preceding the election. One reason is that Russia has been a more direct obstacle to unbridled imperial expansion in the Ukraine and Syria. But I think another could well be the fear of a China/Russia bloc. There would be an analogy to their seeing Iran as their main enemy in the Middle East, but going after their key ally in the region, the far more vulnerable regime in Syria, as a way to isolate and weaken Iran before taking them on more directly.

So, I guess the above indicates two questions for analysis or thoughts you may have.

What are the terms of China's economic relations with the Global South, and what is the potential for that to crowd out the traditional imperialist powers?

What is the basis for the frenzy to confront Russia?

To quote Brecht, “So many questions, so many particulars.” Lynn, I'll repeat that I greatly appreciate your response and our both being engaged in the collective effort to analyze this chaotic and dangerous world in the interests of the oppressed.

Lynn Henderson:

Behind the Russia frenzy

I very much appreciate your comments and insights. They force me to focus and think through my own ideas in a hopefully clearer and more organized form.

You sum up your letter by posing two questions “1. What are the terms of China’s economic relations with the Global South, and what is the potential for that to crowd out the traditional imperialist powers? 2. What is the basis for the frenzy to confront Russia?”

Let me begin by taking up the frenzy to confront Russia, and “frenzy” is certainly the applicable adjective. You surmise, that at least partially, it was launched as a convenient cudgel for large sectors of the ruling class who wanted to rein-in Trump and his “loose cannon” presidency. I think a subsidiary motive is the need to divert attention from the exposed conspiracy in the top levels of the Democratic Party to sabotage the Bernie Sanders campaign in favor of their anointed Hillary Clinton. But as you recognize in your letter there is much more than this behind the Russia campaign.

Today every major political question in this country and throughout the world is being shaped and reshaped by a new emerging political reality—the closing of the almost century long unique historical era of U.S. global hegemony which emerged out of WWII. America’s ruling elite have been thrown into increasing disarray by this new reality. Whatever name they may have used in the past to describe it—“American Exceptionalism,” “Leader of the Free World”—they certainly never contemplated its demise.

The bizarre unfolding of the 2016 presidential election and the completely unforeseen nomination and subsequent election of Donald Trump further confuses and erodes their confidence. Their first reaction has been the launching of a massive propaganda campaign absolving their two-party monopoly from any responsibility in the dangerous Trump victory. “Trump is not our fault,” both the Democratic and Republican wings are saying. Nor is any decline of American capitalism or any decline in our position as leader

of the free world at fault. Rather we are to believe the Trump victory is the product of a diabolical, foreign conspiracy engineered by the Russians, in which Trump and his campaign were most likely complicit.

The U.S. ruling elite are saying to their numerous allies and stooges around the world that Trump is a terrible aberration caused by Russian meddling in the U.S. electoral process. Don’t worry, they declare, Trump will be gone soon enough and sanity will return to the White House and the normal functioning of the global order will be reaffirmed.

Whatever Russian “meddling” may have occurred (which remains completely unproven) it certainly played no significant role in Trump’s election victory over Hillary Clinton. Trump’s main slogan was “Make America Great Again.” Hillary Clinton answered that “America is already great.” President Obama and Hillary both specifically denied that the U.S. economy was in decline despite the overwhelming evidence that so many Trump voters were experiencing to the contrary in their own lives—and they voted accordingly.

Clinton with her racist “super-predator” remarks, and her husband’s sponsorship of the “Anti-Terrorist and Effective Death Penalty Act,” which led to the imprisonment of so many African Americans, along with her opposition to single-payer health insurance, also hurt her voter turnout and support among the African American electorate.

In the meantime, this anti-Russian campaign continues to be aggressively escalated despite considerable long-term costs and damage to the ruling elite itself. It implies a sitting, elected president of the United States, is a possible foreign agent and even a traitor. It undercuts, among large sectors of the nation’s population, the normally sacrosanct legitimacy and integrity of the so-called “intelligence community”

(FBI, CIA, NSA, *etc.*) That legitimacy will not be so easily restored.

But the closing of the long post WWII era of U.S. global hegemony is producing more than just disarray and dangerous charges—dangerous for ruining class stability. The closing of the long post WWII era of U.S. global hegemony is giving birth, for the first time in many decades, to the emergence of a real, political split in the U.S. ruling class. It is a political split that is still in the process of congealing, but like some giant political Mixmaster, it is jumbling former established political positions and categories—it is cutting across Democrat and Republican, conservative and liberal, nationalist and globalist.

The United States as a bourgeois nation-state is an association of corporations that aim at the maximum enrichment of their stockholders, bondholders, directors and managers. As a capitalist nation-state, it is at war—at least economically—with other bourgeois nation-states aiming to enrich their capitalists. This is the very essence of what is called “international trade” under capitalism.

As Sam Williams brilliantly describes in his fine monthly blog, *A Critique of Crisis Theory*², this “war” does not necessarily, under all circumstances, take the form of direct, aggressive and immediate economic attack. Instead under the completely unique conditions of U.S. global hegemony following WWII, Washington adopted a bi-partisan foreign policy, supported by leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties alike, buttressing a world empire in which the corporations of Britain, an economically resurgent Germany, and an economically resurgent Japan, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, and so on were allowed to actually compete with U.S. corporations, cooperatively exploit the Third World, and appropriate a portion of the surplus value for

their non-American owners. As part of the deal, the leaders of rival imperialist states agreed to never again challenge the U.S., either politically or above all, militarily. In this way, “peace” among the imperialist countries would be assured. Things were made easier by the fact that the world market in the wake of the Great Depression and the massive capital destruction of WWII had entered an extended phase of rebuilding and rapid expansion. I think this is an accurate description of what you creatively label “free market imperialism.” (I should say here that throughout this letter I have drawn heavily on positions presented in the Sam Williams blog.)

But, Trump and his “American Firsters” team, led by Steven Bannon as White House Chief Strategist and Harvard trained economist Peter Narvarro, head of the newly formed White House National Trade Council say: “No.” We American capitalists can no longer afford to share the world market in this way either with “our” imperialist allies or newly industrializing nations that were not significant producers of industrial commodities in 1945. Rather we need to return to a policy of aggressive U.S. nationalism. From now on, the U.S. government should use state power to enrich U.S. corporations at the expense of the corporations of other countries, including imperialist “allies,” engaged in capitalist production, just like was done in the “good old days” before 1945.

The mainstream Democrats and Republicans, which Williams calls “The Party of Order”—answer that this is old-fashioned thinking. Under the postwar “liberal world order,” we American capitalists have increasingly appropriated the surplus value produced not only by our own workers but also the lion’s share produced by workers who produce surplus value for non-American industrial capitalists as well. This, the Party of Order holds, is the result of the world order that it so

wisely and farsightedly constructed after 1945. From their point of view, crazy Donald Trump is now threatening to ruin the world “order” that served the billionaires of the world so well for the last 70 years.

Seventy years of the current “order” has led to a situation where the bulk of the surplus value is produced outside the United States and the satellite imperialist countries but appropriated by capitalists within the United States and the other imperialist countries. A portion of this surplus value was then used as a fund to bribe the middle class—very important for political stability within the imperialist countries. Indeed, this bribery was designed to keep a person like Trump from being elected to the presidency in the first place.

Now, this wouldn’t be such a problem, Trump, Bannon, Narvarro, and company believe, if the countries where the surplus value is produced were under our firm colonial or neo-colonial control. For example, in criticizing Obama’s Iraq policy, Trump complained that Obama withdrew U.S. troops from Iraq—which he did briefly—prematurely. Not only should Obama have kept U.S. troops, once they were there, at full strength in Iraq, but seized Iraq’s oil as well. Trump also complains that while President Obama successfully destroyed the government of Libya and did tremendous damage to Syria through his support of pro-imperialist rebels, Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton failed to establish strong colonial—or at least neo-colonial—governments able to enforce law and order.

Because of these policies, the Trumpists point out, Libya, Syria, and Iraq descended into chaos becoming a refuge for “Islamic terrorists” like ISIS, that previously were not able to operate in these countries. And, of course, chaos does not create the best conditions for the extraction of oil and natural gas. Business needs a climate of “law

and order” so that private property is respected and contracts are enforced.

President Trump when he was a candidate pointed out that stable nationalist governments such as the former governments of Saddam Hussein of Iraq or Colonel Qaddafi in Libya, as well as President Assad in Syria, by maintaining a certain amount of law and order, allowed business to proceed. Trump believes that U.S. imperialism should either deal with legitimate nationalist governments—though they are of course far from ideal because they aren’t under “our” direct colonial control—or establish strong colonial governments that can simply hand over their resources, which would be the ideal solution from Trump’s point of view.

Trump and his “American Firsters” team are deadly serious in this perspective. In a recent July 11, 2017 *New York Times* article entitled “Businessmen Get Their Say on Afghan War,” the *Times* reports: “President Trump’s advisers recruited two businessmen who profited from military contracting to devise alternatives to the Pentagon’s plan to send thousands of additional troops to Afghanistan, reflecting the Trump administration’s struggle to define its strategy for dealing with a war now 16 years old.”

The *Times* article continues: “Erik D. Prince, a founder of the private security firm Blackwater Worldwide, and Stephen A. Feinberg, a billionaire financier who owns the giant military contractor DynCorp International, have discussed their proposals to rely on contractors instead of American troops in Afghanistan with both Stephen K. Bannon, Mr. Trump’s chief strategist, and Jared Kushner, his senior advisor and son-in-law, according to people briefed on the conversations.”

The *Times* article further reports that: “Mr. Prince laid out his views in an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* in May. He called on the White House to

appoint a viceroy to oversee the country and to use ‘private military units’ to fill the gaps left by departed American soldiers.”

Russia vs. China

The growing split in the U.S. ruling class is also reflected in diverging assessments of the relative threat posed by Russia versus China. The United States under Obama—and the other Party of Order, the Democrats—seem to prefer so-called “Communist China” to “non-Communist” Russia. They often refer to Russia as America’s most dangerous global enemy. Thomas Wright, a senior fellow in the Project on International Order and Strategy at the *Brookings Institution* in an article originally published in *Foreign Affairs* and republished by the *Brookings Institution*,³ puzzlingly queries: “The mystery is why Trump is so keen to work with Russia. The United States has little economic interest in the Russian economy. Trade and investment are minuscule compared with China. And Russia has very little that the United States wants.” That’s exactly the point say the Trumpists. It is not Russian goods that are flooding into Walmart or subsidized Russian steel that floods our industrial sector.

Under Gorbachev, who presided over the overthrow of the Soviet Communist Party and Boris Yeltsin, the first capitalist president of Russia, the industrial economy developed under Soviet rule was largely destroyed. Today, capitalist Russia is largely a supplier of agricultural, energy and mineral raw materials rather than a major industrial player on the world market. From Trump’s point of view, Russia’s raw materials-oriented economy complements more than competes with the U.S. industrial economy.

The real danger from the viewpoint of the Trump team is not Russia but rather China, which has now surpassed in absolute terms, if not yet per-capita, the U.S. as the country with the highest

level of industrial production in the world. The Trumpists ask, with the industrial districts of the U.S. already reduced to the “rust belt,” which they blame on “unfair” Chinese competition, what would happen if China were, over the coming decades, to reach or even approach the level of U.S. industrial production on a *per-capita* basis? Would U.S. capitalism even survive? This, the Trumpists answer, cannot be allowed to happen.

The BREXIT vote in Britain and the rise to power of Donald Trump in the U.S. signals a resurgence of economic nationalism among the imperialist countries themselves that has been suppressed for 70 years by the U.S. dominant world empire.

The problem from the viewpoint of the U.S. capitalist class and its political representatives—the Party of Order of both Democrats and Republicans and the Trump gang—is that the U.S. capitalists, in squeezing huge amounts of surplus value out of the Chinese, have been forced to help develop China’s productive forces at the same time. The evolution of the post WWII era saw a dramatic growth in the U.S. export of capital, the inevitable result of individual capitalists—under the pressure of competition—seeking the highest rate of profit. The beneficiaries of these capital exports were first the U.S.-defeated European (above all Germany) and Japanese rivals, and then to certain former colonial and semi-colonial countries. Above all, these beneficiaries included the People’s Republic of China.

The Trumpists fear that sometime in the not too distant future, if the present trends continue unchecked, the U.S. capitalists will have to be content with a far smaller share of the global surplus value produced, with disastrous consequences for U.S. imperialism. Trump and his gang believe the U.S. shouldn’t let itself be distracted by an avoidable war—or even war of words—with Russia. Trump believes that it is not Russia but China that must be confronted and must be confronted now.

Obama and the Party of Order of mainstream Democrats and Republicans are often forced to actually share the view that China and not Russia is the U.S.’s most dangerous foreign enemy. But unlike Trump, the Party of Order Democrats and Republicans believe that the rising economic and financial power of China makes it dangerous to bait China in the way that they bait Russia. The Transpacific Partnership (TPP)—backed by both the Democratic and Republican wings of the Party of Order, and which excluded China—was primarily designed to slow China’s development without provoking China “too much.” But TPP collapsed, further reflecting the end of the long U.S. post WWII global hegemony in which U.S. imperialism was largely able to impose its will.

Nor was this strategy limited to the subsequently failed TPP. Under Obama—not Trump—it was announced that the U.S. intended to concentrate 60 percent of its vast military power in the Pacific. One of the reasons Obama did this was to force China to spend more of the huge amounts of surplus value produced by Chinese workers on the military as opposed to transforming it into still more productive capital and thus further slow China’s economic growth.

China follows a different path

How did China become such an industrial threat as opposed to post-

Soviet Russia? Most people, whether they were supporters or enemies of the Chinese Revolution, expected that China would follow the path of the Soviet Union and industrialize itself on the basis of a planned economy, but things have turned out otherwise.

In the 1970s, unable to break the resistance of the peoples of Indochina, the Nixon administration finally decided the time had come to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, including, most importantly, allowing China access to the world market, something they never did with Russia as long as the Soviet Union existed. Nixon-Kissinger's motives in this were driving a wedge between any existing and future Russia-China alliance, increasing long existing antagonisms between China and Vietnam and the possibility of opening China to U.S. investment.

With access to the world market, especially after the victory of Deng Xiaoping's grouping within the Central Committee of the ruling Communist Party of China in 1978, China has industrialized through the massive import of foreign capital, the development of capitalist industry, and a massive expansion of exports. The economic laws governing China's rapid industrialization since 1978 have been the laws that govern the development of capitalism. The Chinese Communist Party itself describes the current Chinese economy as a market economy and not a planned economy like was the case with the Soviet economy. China now has a very wealthy capitalist class topped by billionaires, at the same time land outside of urban real estate remains state owned. Most decisively, unlike with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party remained in power with complete control and direction of the process.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Communist Party essentially disintegrated overnight. The

government and the economy ended up in the hands of opportunist oligarchs with no broader goal than becoming as rich as possible, as quickly as possible. No doubt the Chinese Communist Party is not free of its own corruption and opportunists but they are not in direct control. And in general, the Chinese Communist Party is driven by broader goals and aims.

Resurgent economic nationalism

The BREXIT vote in Britain and the rise to power of Donald Trump in the

The United States as a bourgeois nation-state is an association of corporations that aim at the maximum enrichment of their stockholders, bondholders, directors and managers. As a capitalist nation-state, it is at war—at least economically—with other bourgeois nation-states aiming to enrich their capitalists. This is the very essence of what is called “international trade” under capitalism.

U.S. signals a resurgence of economic nationalism among the imperialist countries themselves that has been suppressed for 70 years by the U.S. dominant world empire. Since the Great Recession, world trade has been growing more slowly than overall economic growth. This reverses the trend of world trade growing faster than economic growth that had prevailed since 1945. The slowdown in world trade

relative to economic growth is a major factor behind the current toxic wave of nationalism, and its inevitable companion—racism—that is sweeping the imperialist countries. It indicates that the “liberal order” was beginning to unravel even before the BREXIT vote and election of Donald Trump.

This resurgence of cutthroat economic nationalism is beginning to express itself in all kinds of unpredictable ways, including increasing divisive pressure on institutions like NATO originally set up by U.S. imperialism to help implement its post WWII order. The Senate recently adopted new sanctions against Russia supposedly as punishment for its “meddling” in the election. The vote was 97 to two, indicating strong bipartisan support. A key aspect of the Senate bill reveals its real intent, which has nothing to do with the U.S. elections. Tucked away in the bill was a clause stipulating sanctions against a proposed new pipeline that would deliver natural gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea.

An article in the British magazine *The Economist*⁴ reported Germany's reaction: “Europe's energy supply is Europe's business, not that of the United States of America,” thundered Germany's foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, and Austria's chancellor, Christian Kern, in a joint statement. The pair were particularly incensed that the bill included a call to increase American exports of liquefied natural gas, implying that blocking Russian gas was partly an effort to help American energy companies. Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, let it be known that she supported her minister.”

After China, the country that is perhaps most unhappy with the rise of Trump is Germany. Indeed, Trump probably sees Germany as the most dangerous enemy of the U.S. after China. Trump attacks Germany's trade policies with the U.S. as one-sided and unfair second only to China. Ironically,

Berlin and Beijing are emerging as the last champions of the expiring “liberal economic order.”

Since 1945, Russia and the Soviet Union before it has been trying to win Germany away from its alliance with the U.S. Early in the post-World War II period, the Soviet Union tried to prevent the division of Germany. Moscow hoped that a united neutral Germany under the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party would act as a buffer between the Soviet Union and the emerging U.S. Empire.

If Germany is forced by the wave of imperialist economic and political nationalism sweeping the United States, Britain, and other imperialist nations to return to a nationalist policy of its own, putting Germany first, it may well come to an agreement with Russia. Russia has many of the raw materials that German industry needs. Russia could sell Germany foodstuffs, oil and gas, and industrial raw materials. In exchange, Germany could sell Russia high-quality consumer goods and, to the extent that Russian industry revives, industrial machinery. If Germany faces the loss of markets in the U.S. and western and southern Europe, it could partially make up for it by finding new markets in Russia. Could Vladimir Putin, with the unwitting help of Donald Trump, succeed where his far more powerful Soviet predecessors failed?

Progressive and reactionary nationalism

The U.S. under both Obama—and now more radically under Trump—is attempting to limit and even roll back China’s attempt to reach a level of industrialization that when considering relative populations would merely put it on a par with the U.S. and the nations of Western Europe. This type of nationalism is entirely reactionary.

On the other hand, China’s own industrialization made possible by the

results of its great revolution, even though carried out on a capitalist basis, is historically progressive. Industrialization is forging the weapons for the Chinese nation to liberate itself from the exploitation of the U.S., but it is also forging the weapons Chinese workers will need to free themselves from exploitation from “their own” native capitalists as well. Therefore, when oppressed nations follow nationalist policies aimed at their industrialization such as protective tariffs, measures restricting the removal of currency from the nation, and so on, the results are progressive.

However, when imperialist countries who already command vast parts of the world market, both their home market and the foreign markets they command through exports, use similar policies against the oppressed nations or against each other the results are reactionary. Compare, for example, the tremendous progress the People’s Republic of China has made since 1949, which is a real contribution to humankind as a whole, and compare the “achievements” of the Hitler regime during the brief 12 years of its existence. At the end of only 12 years of intensely nationalist policies, economic and otherwise, Germany had not only managed to kill untold tens-of-millions of people, but itself was reduced to smoldering ruins both physically and morally.

A great weakness of the Bernie Sanders campaign and the progressive movement that he represents is its failure to take on economic nationalism. Indeed, it is worse than that. Unwilling to challenge the private ownership of the means of production like the Second International did in its better days and the Third Communist International did before its complete Stalinist degeneration, today’s progressives represented by Sanders support economic nationalism. They agree with President Trump and Peter Navarro that it is “bad trade agreements”—and

not capitalist private ownership—that are the cause of the lack of decent jobs and all the problems that flow from it that confront U.S. workers and people in general. As long as capitalism and the capitalist nation-state survives, foreign trade cannot be stripped of its antagonistic character. President Donald J. Trump did not drop from the sky.

Sam Williams in his blog points out that: “Indeed, Peter Navarro himself found his natural ‘home’ in the ‘progressive’ Democratic Party before he teamed up with the racist Trump. The workers in the U.S. rust belt need jobs. There is no doubt about that. But don’t Chinese and Mexican workers need jobs just as much? They do! A policy aimed at protecting ‘American jobs’ at the expense of Mexican jobs or Chinese jobs leads inevitably to war. With the victory of Trump, the ghost of the ruined Berlin of 1945 is casting its dark shadow over the world. This and the images of Nazi death camps is where imperialist economic nationalism inevitably leads.”

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1 <https://4strugglemag.org/2017/03/18/the-context-for-the-trump-phenomenon/>

2 <https://critiqueofcrisistheory.wordpress.com>

3 “Trump’s team of rivals, riven by distrust,” by Thomas Wright, December 15, 2016, *Brookings*

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/12/15/trumps-team-of-rivals-riven-by-distrust/>

4 “Germany’s Russian gas pipeline smells funny to America,” *The Economist*

<https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21723822-angela-merkel-says-nord-stream-2-no-ones-business-germanys-germanys-russian-gas-pipeline>

In Defense of Atheism

KPFA and the Dawkins Cancellation

By CHRIS KINDER

The noted evolutionary biologist, atheist, and author of *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins, was to have spoken in Berkeley in a KPFA-sponsored event in August 2017 focused on his new book, *Science In the Soul, Selected Writings of a Passionate Rationalist*. After a week or so of on-air publicity for this event, and in reaction to complaints from Muslim activists, KPFA cancelled the event.

“KPFA cancelled a book event with Richard Dawkins when members of our community brought our attention to Dawkins’ abusive speech against Muslims. The speech we reviewed included assertions during his current book tour that Islam is the ‘most evil’ of world religions, *Twitter* posts denigrating Muslim scholars as non-scholars and other tweets.

“We serve a broad and diverse community, including many Muslims living under threat of persecution and violence in the current political context. Islamophobic rhetoric stokes that threat. While Mr. Dawkins has every right to express his views, KPFA has every right not to sponsor and profit from an event spreading them. That is what we’ve done.”

The KPFA news report on the cancellation quoted a spokeswoman from the Arab Resource and Organizing Center (AROC) saying that, “Richard Dawkins is a well-known Islamophobe; he’s spoken publicly about Islam being the worst evil in the world today, and has vilified Muslims in extremely sick, racist and misogynist ways... [Dawkins] promotes anti-Islam and anti-Muslim rhetoric.”¹

Dawkins’ “Feminists Love Islamists” Tweet

Richard Dawkins does have a twitter habit, which has gotten him into

trouble, with statements such as “I think Islam is the greatest force for evil in the world today,” and that “Islamophobia” is a “non-word.” He reminds one of another prominent public figure with a bad twitter habit. But that is not all.

One of Dawkins’ tweets included a *YouTube* video titled “Feminists Love Islamists,” which apparently he thought was funny. This piece of trash was part of the evidence cited by the Muslim spokesperson who called KPFA to object to their sponsoring Dawkins, and it is truly vile. In it, simplistic cartoon characters representing an “Islamist” and a “feminist” have a dialog set to music, in which they both proclaim that they have “so much in common.” Woman says: “I say social justice.” Man says: “I say jihad.” Woman: “I say slutwalk.” Man: “I say, where where is your hijab.” Then together they sing that Islamists and feminists are “a slimy pair of little spastics.” Finally, we have: Man: “So, do you mind if I rape you now?” Woman: “Oh don’t be silly, it’s not rape when a Muslim does it” (!!)²

Words escape me. How does this sexist garbage support the “Feminists Love Islamists” title, or provide any other bit of wisdom, which anyone in their right mind would find either funny or illuminating?

This cartoon’s author is a right-wing jerk

Interestingly, the author of this piece of crap answers the question...well sort of. He is an alleged atheist and alleged “center-leftist” named Carl Benjamin, who goes by “Sargon of Akkad,” which is an absurd reference to the first ruler of the unified city states of ancient Sumer, in the Fertile Crescent, in about 2350-2150 BC. Hello, what? Perhaps

Benjamin relates to this time because women were becoming property then and men were dominant (well, the rich priestly ones anyway). Hardly a leftist of any sort, this guy is an open misogynist, male chauvinist and alt-right supporter who thinks white men are the victims. He supported Trump and Marine Le Pen, although he allegedly would have preferred Bernie! But Benjamin would have fit right in with the AltRight/fascist/KKK rally in Charlottesville on August 12th. What a bundle of contradictions!

But that gets us right back to Richard Dawkins, who forwarded this disgusting cartoon video. What was he thinking? Well, perhaps he wasn’t (thinking, that is).

What Does Dawkins Think?

Dawkins, despite his tweet habit, claims not to be a Muslim hater, or a hater of any people. Nor is he an advocate of persecution of Muslims. He points this out, in his “open letter” statement to KPFA in response to his “de-platforming” by KPFA:

“I have never used abusive speech against Islam. I have called IslamISM vile, but surely you, of all people, understand that Islamism is not the same as Islam. I have criticized the ridiculous pseudoscientific claims made by Islamic apologists (‘the sun sets in a marsh,’ *etc.*), and the opposition of Islamic ‘scholars’ to evolution and other scientific truths. I have criticized the appalling misogyny and homophobia of Islam, I have criticized the murdering of apostates for no crime other than their disbelief. Far from attacking Muslims, I understand—as perhaps you do not—that Muslims themselves are the prime victims of the oppressive cruelties of Islamism, especially Muslim women.”³

Dawkins is a UK academic, an emeritus fellow at New College, Oxford, and professor at New College of the Humanities (London). He is the author of many books, including *The Selfish Gene*, and *The God Delusion*. He explained his atheist views on religion in an interview with Evan Davis on the BBC on February 18, 2015: “You can believe anything you like, but don’t impose your beliefs on other people.” He went on to say, “You can’t say ‘I believe this, and you have to believe it too, or else’.” On education, the question of religious schools is “very difficult,” involving “freedom of parents vs. the freedom of children not to be taught erroneous views [which are] imposed upon them.” And, Dawkins said, “teach about religion as history...but not just about an individual religion.”

Dawkins also discussed the wearing of the Islamic burkha, in which females expose only their eyes through a slit, as “personally offensive,” but nevertheless, he says, this is a “personal right” of the wearer. Dawkins also said he is against the “Muslim ban” of Donald Trump, and is a defender of the national rights of Palestinians against the Israeli occupation of Palestine (as well as a supporter of Jeremy Corbyn of the Labor Party).⁴

So far so good, but in another interview, this one with Dave Rubin in New York in 2016, Dawkins admitted to being an elitist: allegedly speaking on rationality, Dawkins said, “[There is] a lovely quote from George Carlin, who said, ‘think how stupid the average person is,’ and I reflect that 50 percent are even stupider than that.” Dawkins goes on, “I’m accused of being an elitist, and I suppose I probably am.”⁵

Abrasive elitist, or fascist thug?

So, Dawkins is an outspoken and abrasive atheist, and also an elitist and upper class twit, who insults people for fun. But is he a fascist or hate-group mobilizer, such as Milo Yiannopoulos, for instance, who was legitimately shut

down by a leftist mobilization on the UC Berkeley campus, and prevented from speaking? That is the question. Of course, nothing about atheism requires any particular social views, so anything is possible. “New atheists,” Dawkins included, are under attack for being rightists and Islamophobes.⁶ But I do not believe that Dawkins, obnoxious and elitist though he is, is an enemy of Muslim people or a proponent of persecuting Muslims, despite his insulting tweets. He is an outspoken and harsh critic of religion—the idea of it, the reactionary effects it has on people—but not of the people who have fallen victim to it. He is a critic of religionists’ views, but not a threat to them or of their right to exist. In short, he is not a fascist. As such, Dawkins should not have been cancelled by KPFA. Rather, he should have been heard, and challenged by any and all who disagree with him for any reason.

KPFA made a mistake in this cancellation, and Dawkins was therefore without his rights to claim that his freedom of speech had been compromised. But this was not “censorship;” KPFA does not have it in its power to censor anyone. And KPFA certainly has the right to sponsor, or not sponsor, whomever it wants. It received complaints from Muslims who felt insulted, and certainly had a tough decision. Nevertheless, those who are fascists, racist thugs, Nazi sympathizers are a different story from the likes of Richard Dawkins. They are essentially action groups, whose only purpose is to smash the working class and racial minorities with force and annihilation. For Marxists, and for anyone with judgment, they have no right of free speech. As Trotsky said, they need to have “their heads acquainted with the pavement.”

Reactionary activists rally around religion

But those with whom we might disagree, even if they are on the right in some sense, should be debated, but not

necessarily silenced. To silence them just hands the right an argument of “free speech denial” that they don’t deserve to have, and which will be used against the left.

And that is most critical. Dawkins, after all, is an opponent of religion, not of people. KPFA knows this, and that is why they originally decided to sponsor him in the first place. Religion has nefarious effects worldwide. KPFA regularly receives attacks and threats from Zionists over its steadfast critiques of the theological state regime of Israel’s brutal occupation of Palestine, in which settlements on Palestinian land are reserved for Jews only, and Palestinians driven out. Dennis Bernstein, of KPFA’s “Flashpoints” show, is regularly threatened and accused of being a “self-hating Jew.” But KPFA doesn’t back down against this (false) accusation of criticizing a religion. And while Jews are not now in the cross-hairs of the state as they were in Nazi Germany, they ARE targeted by the racist thugs who marched in Charlottesville, chanting, “Jews will not replace us,” and “blood and soil.” “Blood and soil” was a Nazi slogan, which supported the persecution of Jews, including Kristallnacht and the holocaust; and the idea that this slogan could now be dragged out of the Nazi dirt in the U.S. is both notorious and outrageous.

The “Patriot Prayer Group,” set to gather in San Francisco on August 26th this year, is another example. Their allegedly “Christian” events are a front for hard-right racist groups, even though one of their spokespersons is African-American. These offshoots of the KKK and Nazis are crawling out like cockroaches from under the kitchen counter into any venue they can occupy.

Religion, in short, is a fallback, and I would say inherent, position for the extreme right. Consider, for instance, the so-called Wolves of Vinland, a far right group in the U.S. West which attempts to revive pre-Christian tribal

and Germanic folk religion as part of its attempt to re-establish white male supremacy. A small group, to be sure, but nevertheless a part of the rightist revival under the ascendance of Trump, which manifested itself in Charlottesville, and an example for other hard rightists.⁷

Religion is divisive

But is Islam “the most evil religion” as Dawkins said in a tweet? Let’s get real about religion. All religions in the world today have much more differences within them—varying from very reactionary and warlike to peaceful and charitable—than they do between them. Thus Muslims in the U.S. and Europe are generally much less radical than those in the Middle East. And the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda radicals who regularly behead apostates, kill civilians with impunity and brainwash

young men and women to blow themselves up in order to kill others, are a minority there, if a terrifying one. Yet they all, somehow, identify as Muslim.

Christianity has its radical right in the U.S. linked with Tea Party reactionaries. These scum support the destruction of Planned Parenthood and of abortion clinics, and even tolerate the murder of doctors who perform abortions. And let’s not forget Christianity’s history of the Crusades, wars to annihilate heretical sects, and the burning of heretics at the stake... alive. What they do now is prevent women from being priests, molest little alter boys at will, and suppress liberation theology, among other crimes. It took a Protestant Reformation and decades of war just to establish that individual believers could pray to their god directly, without a priest’s intervention, whatever that was worth! Yet

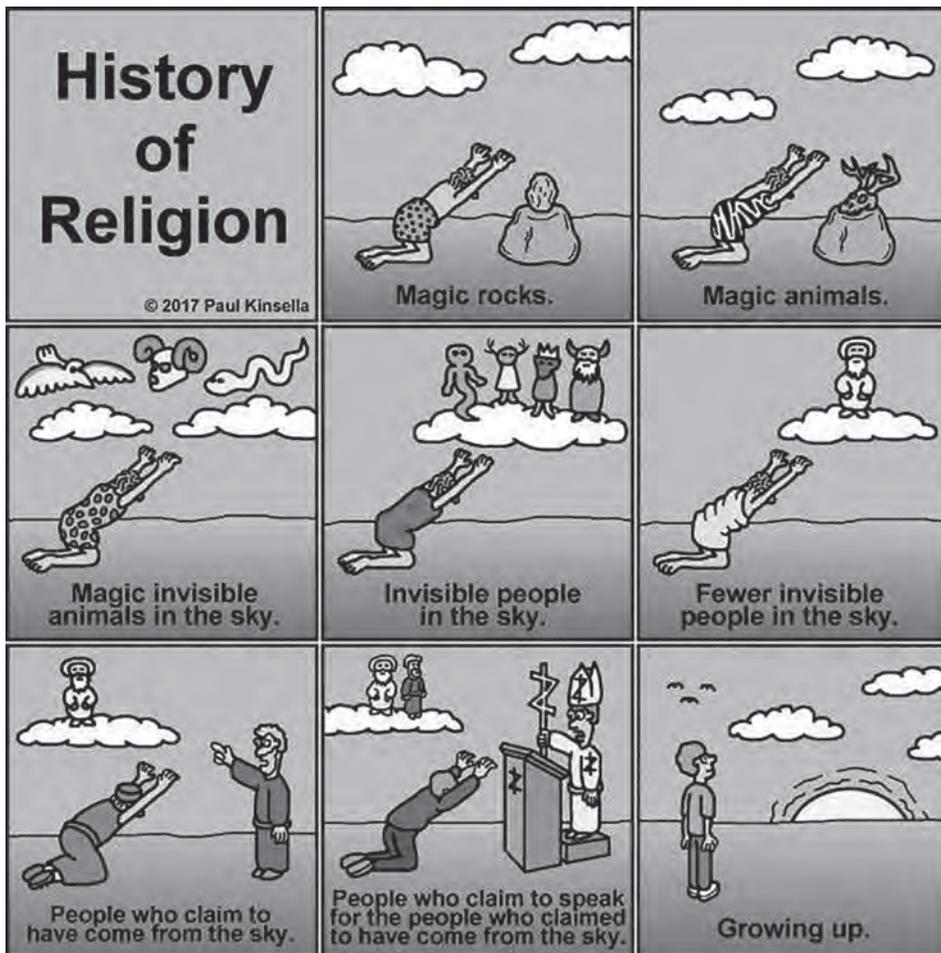
somehow, Christianity lumbers on. The reactionary Christian fundamentalist lobby is a key part of the Tea Party and Republican right wing, which is now challenged to move further to the right by unite-the-right filth.

This motion to the right includes religious aggrandizement. The Hobby-Lobby decision allows private employers to deny services to consumers on the basis of religious prejudice, despite their supposed requirement to serve without discrimination; and the Education Secretary is now accelerating the drive to privatize schools, and turn over taxpayer dollars to religious institutions.

U.S. imperialism is the greatest “evil” in the world today

Hindu masses commit slaughters against Muslims in India, Buddhists persecute Muslim communities in Burma, and I could go on. But what is the real greatest evil in the world today, if not imperialism, and U.S. imperialism in particular? Religion is a tool in the hands of the rulers or imperialists, and always has been. Religion is, in fact, an ideology of the ruling class of its time, invented by people and written by scribes, be they the ancient Egyptians, the Hebrews of the Middle East, or Arabs of Arabia. But in the age of capitalist imperialism, religion—which is now just a hangover from accumulated ancient nonsense-speak—is just another tool of the (British imperialist-inspired) U.S. “divide and conquer” strategy.

U.S. imperialism is in fact the greatest evil in the world today, and this is a fact that people could have taken up with Dawkins had he been allowed to speak at the KPFA event that was cancelled...but, it was cancelled. Tariq Ali said it well: “the ‘mother of all fundamentalisms’ is U.S. imperialism.”⁸ It was U.S. imperialism that, with its invention and promotion of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to oppose the Soviet Union gave new life to Islamic extrem-



ism; and with its invasion of Iraq promoted sectarian war between Sunni and Shia Islamists (who had previously lived side-by-side in peace, and even inter-married.) And it was U.S. imperialism's regional ally, the theocratic abomination of Saudi Arabia, which principally financed and supported the Islamic State (ISIS) and its predecessors in order to prevent a Shia (Iran-Syria-Hezbollah) domination of the fertile crescent (*i.e.*, a "Shia crescent.")

The Russian revolution put religion in its place

Dawkins may be an atheist, but he has no idea of how to convey that diplomatically (by his own admission), or how to actually achieve it as a societal goal. This is another point that could have been taken up with him in a KPFA-sponsored event that never happened: the Russian Revolution of 1917 showed how to put religion in a box. Only a full-on social revolution, putting working people in power, can rid the world of the nefarious influence of religion on society.

The Russian Revolution decreed the following, right from the get-go: First of all, church was fully separated from the state. This was very important, since in pre-revolutionary Russia—never having had a bourgeois revolution—the Church and the Czarist state were like Siamese twins: dues to the church were mandatory; and the Black Hundreds, who conducted murderous raids against Jewish communities, were made an official part of Church function by the Czar. The January 1918 Soviet decree provided that every citizen had freedom of belief, or of "no belief at all." And (take note, Hobby Lobby): "Nobody is entitled to refuse to perform his duties as a citizen on the basis of his religious belief." Also, "The school is separated from the Church." No more state supported yeshivas or madrasas, in today's terms, and no religious schools whatsoever. Churches were allowed their own associations,

but without any special privileges or support from the state. And such religious associations were not allowed to impose "imposts or taxes" or "measures of compulsion or punishment" in respect of their members, nor were they allowed to own property (churches were nationalized, but allowed to be used by their relevant believers.)⁹

The Soviet anti-religious reforms had a lasting effect, which extended well into the years in which the Stalinist political counter-revolution held sway. In the hitherto Muslim-dominated Caucasus and Central Asia, and "even the Ukraine... Local women were frightened and shy." But the revolutionary Zhenotdel, the Bolshevik women's organization, got to work. As late as 1929, "there are extremely affecting reports of how on every May Day and International Women's Day, thousands of women [in the Caucasus and Central Asia] would voluntarily and insolently cast off their veils. Nor did they ever look back."¹⁰

Today's fight against the fascist, white supremacist revivalism stimulated by the Trump regime is supremely important. Now more than ever, the left must both mobilize against fascists and their spokesmen, and come to the defense of immigrants, people of color, Muslims, Jews and any and all those who are in the rightists' crosshairs. But that does not mean that we should drop our opposition to the reactionary effects of religious ideology. Allowing people their right to believe in a god and maintain their culture—as long as they do not force it on others—is a principle to be defended. But revolutionists seek a world

that is free not only of capitalist imperialism, but also of the religious sectarianism and insularity that divides us.

1 KPFA News Story, <https://kpfa.org/blog/statement-decision-cancel-richard-dawkins-event/>

2 Dawkins has deleted this tweet, but see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgccg9xurE8>. Thanks to Isis Feral for supplying this and other Dawkins tweets for this article

3 But of course he did say that "Islam" not "IslamISM" "is the most evil religion. See the report in the *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/24/richard-dawkins-event-cancelled-over-his-abusive-speech-against-islam>

4 BBC interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAV_0s1c2V4

5 Dave Rubin and Richard Dawkins, New York, 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=p59TDk8nOkc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p59TDk8nOkc).

6 See for instance, Nathan Lean, "Dawkins, Harris, Hitchens: New Atheists Flirt with Islamophobia," *Salon*, March 30, 2013.

7 See this piece from the anti-fascist site, *itsgoingdown*: The Wolves of Vinland: a Fascist Countercultural "Tribe" in the Pacific Northwest, December 11, 2016, <https://itsgoingdown.org/wolves-vinland-fascist-countercultural-tribe-pacific-northwest/>

8 Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, Verso 2002.

9 "The Separation of the Church from the State and the School," in Mervyn Mathews, ed., *Soviet Government: A Selection of Official Documents on Internal Policies*, New York, 1974, pp 32-33.

10 Tariq Ali, *The Dilemmas of Lenin, Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution*, Verso 2017.



“Finland Station” and the Struggle for Socialism Today

BY ALAN JONES

A Response to Bhaskar Sunkara

At the end of June, in the midst of a growing discussion about socialism in the United States, Bhaskar Sunkara published an important op-ed in the *New York Times* entitled “Socialism’s Future May Be Its Past.”¹

Sunkara, editor of *Jacobin* magazine and a Vice Chair of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA,) attempts to draw out lessons from the Russian Revolution and take up the relevance of socialist and radical ideas in our time. It was a distinctly different and more sympathetic assessment than other recent articles in the same publication addressing the 100-year anniversary of that historic event. As one point of comparison, a week earlier, the *New York Times* printed an article by right-wing author Sean McMeekin which sought to revive the long ago discredited “Lenin was a German spy” conspiracy theory.

It should come as no surprise that a large section of the mainstream media and pro-capitalist commentators are again devoting time and resources to distort and discredit socialist ideas, including no less than the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, as Sunkara points out. This distortion campaign is a response to the revival of socialism, which has begun to take place in the U.S. on the heels of the incredibly popular campaign of Bernie Sanders.

Sanders called out for a “political revolution” against Wall Street and the one percent, and in so doing galvanized millions of workers and young people who have been radicalized by the deep social crisis of capitalism and have begun to question the viability of the system. An estimated 1.3 million people attended Sanders’ mass rallies. In another welcome development, left and socialist organizations, like Socialist

Alternative, have grown rapidly. The Democratic Socialists of America has grown three-fold, from roughly 8,000 to nearly 25,000 members since Trump was elected last November.

In his op-ed, Sunkara generally defends the Russian Revolution as a positive development, and the mere fact of the article being published in the U.S. “paper of record” is itself a sign of the changing times. As Sunkara’s article suggests, in order to turn the tide against the bankrupt *status quo* today we will need to look back and learn the key lessons from the history of the global working-class movement. We must equip ourselves with the best ideas in order to defeat Trump and the worldwide capitalist offensive on our living standards and democratic rights. Unfortunately, in his article Sunkara does not offer a rounded-out socialist alternative. Instead he seems to argue that a “regulated market,” a foundation stone of capitalism, should continue in the society socialists should be striving to create.

There is an important tradition of socialists having a fraternal discussion on important issues of strategy, tactics and program. This has played an essential role in educating socialists, other activists and the general public about the best methods to change society. We offer this article as part of that tradition, not to distort points of view, but instead to contrast different approaches to issues.

Sunkara’s three “stations”

In his discussion of the state of modern politics, Bhaskar paints a picture of the key trends that dominate the politics of the capitalist class today: One is the “Singapore Station” which he casts as the logical conclusion of the politics of mainstream neoliberals like Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. A second,

“Budapest Station,” represents the ultimate destination of right-wing populism like Donald Trump’s. The third, “Finland Station,” is of course the main subject of his article and a reference to the Russian Revolution and the endpoint of Vladimir Lenin’s historic train journey back from abroad in early 1917.

Sunkara’s critique of neoliberalism in the “Singapore Station” section makes important points, but also reveals limitations in his approach. While acknowledging its undemocratic character and relentless drive for neoliberal austerity, he portrays it as relatively benign by understating its brutality and real human costs: “The Singapore model is not the worst of all possible endpoints. It’s one where experts are allowed to be experts, capitalists are allowed to accumulate, and ordinary workers are allowed a semblance of stability. But it leaves no room for the train’s passengers to yell ‘Stop!’ and pick a destination of their own choosing.” This dramatically understates the character of neoliberalism and results of its worship of unrestrained capitalism: the vicious driving down of workers’ living standards in the name of profit, the loss of access to vital services like healthcare, the loss of millions of lives from wars over resources, the many and varied disasters of de-regulation (like that recently at Grenfell Towers in London,) and finally to neoliberalism’s complete inability to offer a future for youth and working people around the world.

It is precisely this model’s instability and brutality that opens the door to the “Budapest station” of right wing populists like Trump (and the authoritarian regimes in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere,) in the desperate search of middle and working class people for some alternative to the dominant “Singapore” route of capitalism.

In his article, Bhaskar gets into what his own “Finland Station” vision of socialism would look like. He explains that it would entail “Worker-owned cooperatives, still competing in a regulated market; government services coordinated with the aid of citizen planning; and the provision of the basics necessary to live a good life (education, housing and healthcare) guaranteed as social rights. In other words, a world where people have the freedom to reach their potentials, whatever the circumstances of their birth.”

Without a doubt, such changes would represent a significant step forward despite being under threat of attack every time capitalism entered into one of its periodic crises. But this is not the same as the goal of socialism: a global, classless society which does away with capitalism’s organized apparatus of repression and replaces it with a new political order based on mass democratic organs of working people and the oppressed. This has always been the destination called for by the socialist and Marxist movement. Many today, even on the left, may see this vision as hopelessly utopian. But as Marx argued, it is the massive development of human productivity under capitalism, which has laid the material basis to eradicate class division and oppression rooted in scarcity.

Marxism and the State

Bhaskar also states: “Stripped down to its essence, and returned to its roots, socialism is an ideology of radical democracy. In an era when liberties are under attack, it seeks to empower civil society to allow participation in the decisions that affect our lives.”

Yet a central tenet of Marxism is that capitalist democracy is only a form of state rule. And Marx argues the dominant class in society is the one that controls the state apparatus. Marxists have long championed the most far-reaching, radical democracy. But Marxism has also explained that

democracy does not exist in abstract. It must be understood in connection with the dominant economic system. Under capitalism, democracy is always severely curtailed by the domination of the small propertied elite, which uses their power to prevent the majority from touching the foundations of their wealth and privilege. In other words, championing “radical democracy” can only be done consistently if it is linked to ending the undemocratic rule of the capitalist class and transferring power into the hands of the working class and the oppressed.

But as Marx argued, it is the massive development of human productivity under capitalism, which has laid the material basis to eradicate class division and oppression rooted in scarcity.

Bhaskar does not clarify this. In his “broad outline” of a future socialism, which is dominant: market forces or the workers’ cooperatives? Bhaskar further states: “This social democracy would involve a commitment to a free civil society, especially for oppositional voices; the need for institutional checks and balances on power; and a vision of a transition to socialism that does not require a ‘year zero’ break with the present.”

However, if we are talking about ending the brutal and decaying capitalist system, how can this be done without having a fundamental, thoroughgoing break with the present order and its deeply undemocratic and repressive state apparatus? Instead, it appears that Bhaskar is arguing against this when he says his vision of a transition to social-

ism does not require a “year zero” break with the present. It was this central point that Lenin argued for when he returned to Russia in 1917. Lenin stated that the feeble capitalists in Russia could not and would not deliver benefits for the working class. He called for the working class and poor peasants to break the power of the landlords and capitalists over society, and appeal to workers in other countries to follow this example and begin the construction of a socialist society based on workers’ democracy.

Fighting for reforms

As Marxists, we in Socialist Alternative fight for every gain that working people can win under capitalism. This can be seen in our leadership in the fight for \$15, with Socialist Alternative member and Seattle City Councilwoman Kshama Sawant leading Seattle to become the first major city to pass a \$15 minimum wage. Two weeks ago, we helped make Minneapolis the first Midwest city to pass \$15, this time under the leadership of socialist City Council candidate, Ginger Jentzen. And just last week, Sawant and Seattle Socialist Alternative helped bring about another nationally important victory, this time a local measure to tax the rich to help fund affordable housing, education and other vital services.

In April of 2017, Kshama Sawant responded to questions in the *Huffington Post* about her views on socialism:

“...There are limits to reforming a system that is dominated by these massive and rapacious corporations. On the basis of capitalism, victories like raising the minimum wage are only temporary. Big business has many tools to make us pay for the crisis of their system. Again, a permanent and sustainable solution to all the problems facing working people is possible only by taking the biggest companies into democratic ownership, and reorganizing the

economy on a planned basis. Under such a system we could democratically decide how to allocate resources. We could rapidly transition away from fossil fuels, develop massive jobs programs to rebuild the country's rotting infrastructure, and begin to build a whole new world based on meeting the needs of the majority, not the profits of a few."

The issues raised by Sunkara about reform and revolution are not just abstract questions of historical interest. Which "station" we end up at today is intimately linked to how we assess the defeats and successes of the past.

After World War II, in an era of post-war reconstruction and huge economic growth, and under the enormous pressures of mass socialist and communist parties and radical labor struggles, important gains for working people were won in most Western countries. But the tenuous economic landscape of today is radically different, with capitalism incapable of enjoying a sustained upswing, relentlessly attacking unions and working conditions, and demanding deep budget cuts in order to just maintain profitability and survive.

The new parties of the left can end up at a neoliberal "Singapore Station" in the present even as they look to "Finland Station" of the past, if they fail to draw the correct lessons. If left parties are elected to government without a definite program for an alternative to capitalism and a strategy to achieve it, they will inevitably be driven instead into attempting to manage capitalism, which can mean carrying out neoliberal austerity dressed up with kind words of compassion. Reform-minded, anti-austerity governments will ultimately be forced to choose between accepting the demands of big business or implementing radical and socialist measures.

As Rosa Luxemburg explained in 1900 in her pamphlet *Reform or Revolution* these two choices are not

just "different roads" to the same station. Because to be successful, the struggle for reform cannot be an end unto itself—serious reforms only come about as a by-product of serious social struggle. The capitalist class needs to be genuinely fearful of a wider revolt before it will grant major concessions like Medicare for All or a federal \$15 minimum wage.

Further, if the struggle for reform is not used to develop the consciousness of working people and prepare the ground for a thoroughgoing socialist transformation of society, the capitalists will look to roll back the reforms, which have been won, or to destroy those working class forces, which defend them. The ruling class will not hesitate to engage in economic war or even military *coups* against elected left governments. Left governments seeking to carry out their programs will run headlong into the brick wall of capitalist ownership and control of the key resources in society, as well as the capitalist state apparatus. This can be clearly seen in what happened to SYRIZA in Greece.

Bashkar appears to implicitly reject the idea of a radical, revolutionary transformation of society when he says his vision of a transition to socialism "does not require a 'year zero' break with the present." But the view that capitalism can be gradually changed in the direction of a just order flies in the face of the experience of the past 100 years, and specifically to the neoliberal assault on the gains of the working class. Capitalism in decay means that there are real limits to reform and that even the most popular, hard-won gains are reversible.

The rise and fall of SYRIZA

In Greece, SYRIZA, a left coalition party, saw its support grow exponentially from 4.9 percent in 2009 to being elected on an anti-austerity program to lead the Greek government in January 2015. Yet a few months later its leader

Alexis Tsipras utterly capitulated, ignoring an over 61 percent "No" vote against austerity in the referendum his government called, and agreed to the demands of the capitalists and the European Union for further savage cuts to living standards. This was a serious blow against the left internationally which had looked to SYRIZA and Greece to lead the struggle against austerity. The betrayal of SYRIZA's leadership and its virtual transformation into a neoliberal prop is a bucket of cold water which shows that decisions about program, strategy and tactics are not abstract but have real life consequences.

In a recent article from *Xekinima*, Socialist Alternative's sister organization in Greece through the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI,) there is a description of the current situation in Greece:

"The attack on the living standards and rights of the Greek people is actually deepening under the Syriza government. It tries to hide this by speaking of 'hard negotiations' and 'doing everything possible' against the 'Institutions,' the new name for the troika of the EU Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB,) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF.) But this is just theater. The latest agreement of June 15 released €5.5 billion to Greece (out of which €2.2 will be used immediately to pay back loans.) It added nothing to the Institutions' proposals made at the Eurogroup meeting on May 22.

"The latest agreement puts additional burdens of around €5 billion on the masses between 2019 and 2022. ...It has increased indirect taxation on everything, including the most basic goods like Greek coffee and traditional souvlaki, by 20 percent. It is cutting pensions by a further nine percent on average. It is applying measures that (former ruling parties) ND and Pasok found impossible to get through, with the biggest privatization program ever.

The labor market remains a jungle where the huge majority of private-sector workers are owed months of wages and exploitation has reached indescribable conditions....

“As a result, the prevailing feelings of working people are mass anger and, at the same time, mass demoralization.”

Responding to the question of whether capitulation was inevitable, the article continues:

“The capitulation of Syriza to the troika was not unavoidable. It was the result of the leadership’s lack of understanding of the real processes taking place, the naive if not criminal perception that they would ‘change Greece and the whole of Europe,’ as Tsipras boasted. It was the lack of understanding of the class nature of the EU and a complete lack of confidence in the working class and its ability to change society. When Tsipras came face to face with what it really means to clash with the ruling class he fell into despair and capitulated, completely unprepared.”

The alternative, which was developed and advocated by some Greek left organizations—including Xekinima—pointed to the need for policies that would break with capitalism and begin a socialist reconstruction of society. As Xekinima explained, a genuine left government should:

“Impose capital controls; refuse to pay the debt; nationalize the banks; move speedily towards a national currency (drachma); use the liquidity provided by that currency to finance major public works, to stop the continuous contraction of the economy and put it back on the path of growth; cancel the debts of small businesses crushed by the crisis and provide loans under favorable conditions so they can get back into activity and provide a quick spur to the economy.

“Nationalize the commanding heights of the economy; plan the economy, including a state monop-

ly of foreign trade, so that it acquires sustained growth and does not serve the profits of a handful of ship owners, industrialists and bankers, but is in the service of the 99 percent. Create special planning committees in every sector of industry and mining, and put particular attention into agriculture and tourism, which are key to the economy and have huge potential. Establish democracy in the functioning of the economy, through workers’ control and management in

the view that capitalism can be gradually changed in the direction of a just order flies in the face of the experience of the past 100 years, and specifically to the neoliberal assault on the gains of the working class. Capitalism in decay means that there are real limits to reform and that even the most popular, hard-won gains are reversible

every field and level. Appeal to the workers of the rest of Europe for support and solidarity, calling on them to launch a common struggle against the EU of the bosses and the multinationals. For a voluntary, democratic, socialist union of the peoples of Europe. In short, an anti-capitalist, anti-EU offensive on a socialist program and class internationalist solidarity was the answer to the troika’s blackmail.”

We see from the experience of SYRIZA that new left formations can set out toward Bhaskar’s version of “Finland” but instead end up in “Singapore” station. In order to effec-

tively fight against austerity in a time of capitalist crisis, we need a Marxist program for fundamental change and a plan to mobilize workers, young people and the poor to fight for it.

Consciousness today

Despite the tremendous struggles that we have seen recently in Greece, Spain and Portugal as well as the rise of Jeremy Corbyn in Britain—which represents nothing less than a political revolt of the working class and youth—it must be said that there has not as yet emerged a mass socialist consciousness. The consciousness among activists is still mostly anti-corporate and sometimes anti-capitalist, but unclear as to the way forward. This is important because it is a point of departure not only for analysis but also for accurately mapping the struggles ahead.

Capitalism has been discredited among young people, but there is little understanding about how to fight the system or what it could be replaced with. Most people at protests have little experience with ongoing movements, organizations or struggles that can win victories. This flows from the defeats inflicted on the workers’ movement in recent decades with declining union density and setbacks on an international scale.

It wasn’t always like this. Bhaskar says that “across the West, workers came to accept a sort of class compromise” in the 20th century. In reality, working people in Europe built movements countless times in attempts to overthrow capitalism, from Germany after World War I to the Spanish Civil War to the revolutionary upturns in France in 1968 and Portugal in 1974. The social democratic and Stalinist leaders in fact held these movements back with their outlook of “gradual” change, and the result was often rampant right-wing reaction.

By the end of the 20th century, the collapse of Stalinism and its monstrous bureaucracy was being used to dis-

credit any idea of a planned economy and opened the door for a massive campaign against socialism in order to drive home the message that “there is no alternative” to capitalism and the market. While the systems in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in no way represented genuine socialism, this collapse was nonetheless a serious political defeat for the working class internationally.

In recent decades, the social democratic parties swung dramatically to the right and implemented austerity, destroyed their democratic structures and lost the vast majority of their activist base even before the financial crash of 2008. In this context, the Committee for a Workers’ International posed the need for new, broad parties of the left and the working class.

The recent surge of left populist ideas—as reflected by the stunning election results for Jeremy Corbyn in Britain, the Mélenchon campaign in the recent French elections, but also the rise of the left in PODEMOS in Spain, the important gains by the revolutionary left in Ireland, and the historic campaign of Sanders in the U.S. (and including the growth of DSA and other socialist forces.) All these developments reflect the beginnings of a search for a radical socialist direction, on the part of the youth and sections of the working class seeking a path out of the morass of capitalism.

Bolshevism is not Stalinism

If genuine socialist ideas are to once again become the international rallying cry for a new society, inevitably we will have to seriously and honestly discuss the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks, and Lenin.

The Russian Revolution shaped the entire political history of the last 100 years and represented a colossal effort to establish a new socialist world. Millions internationally were inspired to fight not just for a more “manage-

able” version of capitalism but for a new socialist world based on solidarity, and without war and exploitation. Many of the gains and reforms working people won across the globe including the eight-hour day, voting rights for women, free education, healthcare, and a broad social safety net, came in the aftermath of the revolutionary wave unleashed by the Russian Revolution.

This also requires workers’ developing their own mass independent party, democratically run, which can unite young people, the working class and poor to wage a determined struggle against the billionaire class.

The Russian Revolution was thoroughly democratic with workers, soldiers and peasant councils (called “soviets”) built from below with all left parties represented. The Bolsheviks went from being a small minority in the soviets to the leading force in the revolution through the course of 1917 by democratically winning over the masses of people to their program to defeat reaction, war and poverty.

Workers councils, built from below, have been a feature of revolutionary struggles since the Paris Commune of 1871 and the first Russian revolution in 1905. Similar features developed in China in the period 1925-27, the Spanish revolution of 1931-37, France 1968, and Chile before the 1973 *coup*, just to name a few examples. We have seen similar phenomena of “revolutionary democracy” in virtually every major upheaval centered on the working class across the globe.

Bhaskar seems to be unaware of the democratic role of the soviets, while implying there was something fundamentally undemocratic about the Russian Revolution. While appealing for a return to the “Finland station” he insists that things will be different this time around. The key difference, he says, is that “This time, people get to vote. Well, debate and deliberate and then vote.” But the Bolsheviks did “debate and deliberate and then vote,” quite often in fact. If they hadn’t done that, both internally and in the soviets, the October revolution would not have been successful.

The strategy and tactics of the Bolsheviks corresponded to a rapidly changing situation in 1917. They fought under the banner of “Peace, Land and Bread” as they sought to undermine illusions in the different pro-capitalist “provisional governments,” which refused to act on any of the key issues which brought about the February revolution. The Bolsheviks helped hold back a premature July attempt of the Petrograd working class to seize power that would have been drowned in blood. When the vast majority of the movement turned fully against the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks boldly mobilized exploited and oppressed people to end the war, seize the holdings of the big landlords and establish a planned economy. All of these strategies and tactics were debated and voted on not only within the Bolshevik party but also with the mass democratic participation of workers, soldiers and peasants in the soviets and other bodies like the factory shop committees.

Bhaskar appears to imply in his op-ed that the totalitarian Stalinist regime, which developed later, was a logical continuation of Lenin and the Bolshevik party when he writes “One hundred years after Lenin’s sealed train arrived at Finland Station and set into motion the events that led to Stalin’s gulags.” On this point both the

Stalinists and the capitalist propaganda in the West are in complete agreement.

The main argument of most of those who attack the Bolsheviks is that they supposedly wanted to centralize all power and to eliminate all opposition. But this was not at all what happened in Russia in 1917, which was in reality the most democratic revolutionary upheaval that has ever taken place. It was after the Bolsheviks had come to power in October, with the overwhelming support of the soviets, that other political parties went over, one by one, to the side of the armed counter-revolution and helped plunge the country into civil war. At the same time, twenty-one armies invaded the Soviet Union, including the U.S., Britain, France, and Japan. Alongside international solidarity, the only thing that allowed the Bolsheviks to survive the prolonged civil war, invasions, famine and destruction of the country was the fact that they enjoyed the overwhelming support of the population, who fought back against the murderous, pro-capitalist reaction.

How Stalinism developed

Leon Trotsky, who along with Lenin was a key leader of the Russian Revolution, wrote that a “river of blood” separated the Bolsheviks from Stalinism. The Bolshevik party was arguably—and new historical research further confirms this—the most democratic party of working people so far in history, and at the same time the most successful in leading the working class to power. Lenin and Trotsky perceived the revolution in Russia as a prelude to the European revolution and beyond, and understood that socialism could only be based on an international and voluntary federation of socialist countries, which included the most economically developed societies. They understood that capitalism globally would fight back against a new workers’ state, and that one socialist country (and particularly one as eco-

nomically backward as Russia) could not survive on its own.

Stalinism did not arise from Bolshevism but from the isolation of the revolution in the young Soviet republic, famine, backward economic and cultural conditions, and the perishing of the most self-sacrificing worker leaders in the course of the civil war. The disappointment of the masses with the failures of the European revolutions was a key factor, especially in Germany from 1918-1923.

These conditions allowed the rise of Stalinism as the Soviet officialdom increasingly controlled the use and distribution of scarce resources, thereby enabling themselves to become privileged. A precondition for the rise of this privileged Stalinist bureaucracy was the destruction of the democratic traditions of Bolshevism, including the crushing of soviet democracy, mass repression of the Left Opposition, the extermination of virtually the entire Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917, and ultimately the assassination of Leon Trotsky in 1940. The rise of Stalinism first undermined the planned economy by destroying the democracy necessary to its function, and eventually led to its destruction in what Trotsky had explained as the bureaucracy “consuming” the first workers’ state.

Not only did Leninism not usher in Stalinism, it took in fact a bloody counterrevolution by the bureaucracy to reverse many of the democratic gains of the Russian Revolution and impede the struggle of workers worldwide for socialism. The Communist parties around the world ceased to struggle for fundamental change, instead becoming props for Stalin and the needs of his bureaucracy, ideologically defended by his policy of “socialism in one country.” Socialists today will be confronted with questions about the Russian Revolution and the totalitarian caricatures of “communism.” We need to have clear answers

to these historical issues and effectively apply these lessons from 1917 to the workers’ movement today, which is operating in very different and rapidly-shifting conditions.

Two souls of social democracy

Bhaskar expresses some sympathy for the Bolsheviks in his op-ed. However, he also says, “[we] may choose to see them as well-intentioned people trying to build a better world out of a crisis, but we must work out how to avoid their failures.” Certainly we must learn from mistakes, but the same principle must also apply to the political decisions of the Second International of the early 20th century that Sunkara seeks to replicate. Bhaskar correctly states early in his article that the communist movement was “born out of a sense of betrayal by the more moderate left-wing parties of the Second International.” He goes on to explain how those social democratic parties betrayed the working class with their refusal to oppose the slaughter of World War I.

Yet there is no attempt by Bhaskar to explain why the parties of the social democracy “abetted the slaughter [of World War I] that claimed 16 million lives.”

Bhaskar points out that “the Bolsheviks once called themselves ‘social democrats.’” This is true on the surface, in the sense that, to use Bhaskar’s wording, the Bolsheviks were “part of a broad movement of growing parties that aimed to fight for greater political democracy and using the wealth and the new working class created by capitalism, extend democratic rights into the social and economic sphere, which no capitalist would permit.”

But here too there is an important distinction. The early social democrats—from the time of the inception of the Second International in 1889, helped by the guidance of Engels until his death—maintained at least in

words a revolutionary Marxist view on key issues and stood for the overthrow of capitalism and for socialism. Today, the term “social democrat” has come to mean a path of reform within capitalism and an explicit rejection of revolution, Marxism, and Leninism.

An ideological battle between the ideas of reform and revolution did take place in the broad tent of “social democracy” in Lenin’s time before 1917. This can be most clearly shown in the prolonged debate that erupted inside the social democracy against “revisionism” over the question of how the working class would come to power.

The main reformist theorist of social democracy of that time was Eduard Bernstein, who argued that there was no need for workers to take power and socialism would come through the gradual extension of democratic rights, co-ops, trade unions and public services. Other reformists argued that workers would in effect “take power” using the existing parliamentary democratic institutions. Bernstein said that “the final aim of socialism, whatever it may be, means nothing to me; it is the movement itself which is everything.” Rosa Luxemburg, along with Karl Kautsky before he began to “reneege” on his previous positions in 1910, rejected these views and argued that the working class needed to seize power and to overthrow capitalism as the only way to defeat the resistance of the ruling class and defend the new workers’ state.

These reformist views did not fall from the sky, they reflected the conservative outlook of the parliamentary, trade union and party functionaries who had begun to integrate into the capitalist regime under the conditions of the prolonged period of economic boom before World War I, when capitalism was still capable of developing society’s productive forces. When the crisis of capitalism led to war between

the capitalist powers, the betrayal by the social democratic leaders in supporting their “own” ruling class completely disoriented the working class and the labor movement across Europe and internationally.

It was Lenin and the Bolshevik party, along with a handful of internationalists like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, that opposed World War I and defended the traditions of “revolutionary social democracy” and Marxism. The discrediting of capitalism during the three-year slaughter of 16 million people in the battlefields of Europe helped prepare the way for revolution across Europe, starting with Russia. Millions around the world rallied to support the Russian Revolution and the new Third International.

When we discuss the history of social democracy, we must make a clear distinction between the early revolutionary social democracy as opposed to the conservative, reformist social democracy that opened the door to war and aligned itself with capitalism against the revolutionary movements of the working class.

The continuing debate today

Successfully translating mass opposition to austerity and the ills of the capitalist system into effective action against racism, sexism, war, poverty and joblessness, depends on adopting a bold fighting program, strategies and tactics. Just as the Bolsheviks did in 1917, we must analyze a fast-moving situation to find the best proposals and slogans that can move people into action. This also requires workers’ developing their own mass independent party, democratically run, which can unite young people, the working class and poor to wage a determined struggle against the billionaire class.

History shows that ideas, program and leadership matter, and opportuni-

ties to challenge capitalism will only be fully successful if the ideas of Marxism can take hold in the working class with an organized socialist left.

Socialists in the U.S., while starting from building a movement against the attacks of Trump and the Republicans in power, must also continue to engage in constructive debate about how to build the movement and political power for working people. Movements here today will not happen exactly the same way as in Greece the past few years or the Russian Revolution 100 years ago, but there are important lessons to be learned from all these experiences.

Today the socialist movement faces dual tasks. On the one hand, we need to bring together socialist, progressive, and fresh forces into broad and united action, struggle and resistance to defeat the right wing and the neoliberal offensive. But we also must seek to win the advanced layers of working people and youth to the understanding that a bold socialist program is the only way out of the crisis of capitalism, and of the need to build a revolutionary organization capable of leading the fight to win such a program.

Crucial debates like this one around working-class history, international struggle, strategy and program must continue as we work together to defeat the billionaire class and rebuild a powerful socialist movement.

Alan Jones is a member of Socialist Alternative and elected member of its National Executive Committee.

—CounterPunch, July 28, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/07/28/finland-station-and-the-struggle-for-socialism-today/>

¹ https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/26/opinion/finland-station-communism-socialism.html?_r=0

Class War on the Waterfront

Longshore workers under attack

By JACK HEYMAN

The ink wasn't even dry on the West Coast longshore contract when the head of the employers' group, the Pacific Maritime Association, proposed an additional three-year extension to the president of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), making it an eight-year contract. While the number of registered longshore jobs, 14,000, is the about same as in 1952, revenue tonnage has increased 14 times to a record-breaking 350 million revenue tons.

...what's needed now is a workers party to fight for a workers government that would expropriate the maritime industry, in ports and at sea, while establishing workers control.

Under the current contract employers have already eliminated hundreds of longshore jobs through automation on marine terminals like the fully-automated Long Beach Container Terminal and semi-automated TraPac in the port of Los Angeles. "By the end of an extended contract in 2022, several thousand longshore jobs will be eliminated on an annual basis due to automation," warned Ed Ferris, president of ILWU Local 10 of San Francisco. With driverless trucks and crane operators in control towers running three cranes simultaneously, the chances of serious and deadly accidents are enormous.

Now maritime employers are pulling out all stops to push through this

job-killing contract extension, using both Democratic and Republican politicians, high-powered PR firms and even some union officials.

A *San Francisco Chronicle* op-ed appeared this week by Democrat Mickey Kantor, former Secretary of Commerce who was responsible for creating the World Trade Organization and the North American Free Trade Association, which lost millions of jobs and Norman Mineta, another Democrat former Secretary of Commerce, from the public relations firm Hill and Knowlton. The first public relations firm was hired by Rockefeller to clean up his public image after nearly 100 people, men, women and children were killed in a 1914 Colorado miners strike known as the Ludlow Massacre and employers continue to use PR firms today.

The authors of this week's *San Francisco Chronicle* pro-company PR piece talk of preserving "labor peace" and refer to West Coast port shut-downs over the last 15 years. Yes, there is a class war on the waterfront, but it's being waged by the employers. Those port closures were caused by employer lockouts in 2002, 2013 and 2014 during longshore contract negotiations. The 2002 lockout was ended after Democrat Diane Feinstein called on President Bush to invoke the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act directed not against the maritime employers' lockout but the longshore union. The only time the ILWU shut down Pacific Coast ports in that period was May Day 2008 to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the first-ever labor strike in the United States against a war.

The two Democrats cite distorted figures for wages and pensions that only reflect the highest skill level after a

lifetime of work in one of the most dangerous industries. And then they threaten that "if the contract proposal is rejected" it could lead Republicans and Democrats alike to impose anti-strike legislation on the waterfront. The ILWU backed Bernie Sanders in the last election and then Hillary Clinton. Yet no matter who leads it, the Democratic Party represents the employer class, Wall Street on the waterfront. Clearly what's needed now is a workers party to fight for a workers government that would expropriate the maritime industry, in ports and at sea, while establishing workers control.

There are tens-of-millions of unemployed in this country. The labor movement should launch a new campaign for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay as part of a struggle for full employment to benefit all, not Trump and his Wall Street bankster cronies.

The so-called "friends of labor" Democrats have been enlisted by PMA because earlier this year at the Longshore Caucus, a union meeting representing dockworkers on all West Coast ports, the San Francisco longshore delegates voted unanimously to oppose a contract extension. Last week they held a conference at their union hall on automation and the proposed

contract extension. One proposal was to make automation benefit dockworkers by reducing the workweek to 30 hours while maintaining 40 hours pay, creating another work shift.

There are tens-of-millions of unemployed in this country. The labor movement should launch a new campaign for a shorter workweek at no loss in pay as part of a struggle for full employment to benefit all, not Trump and his Wall Street banker cronies. In resisting the push for this contract extension to automate jobs out of existence, ILWU waterfront workers can stand up for all workers.

Jack Heyman is a retired Oakland longshoreman who edits the Maritime Worker Monitor, chairs the Transport Workers Solidarity Committee, and is a member of the Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

—Counter Punch, July 21, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/07/21/class-war-on-the-waterfront-longshore-workers-under-attack/>

Fiat Chrysler/UAW Corruption Case

How labor-management cooperation profits the companies

BY JAMES NAPIER

The wages of collaboration

The indictments involving a Fiat Chrysler exec and a UAW official should confirm long-held suspicions that the “team concept” and cooperation between union and company has led to bad contracts, and sapping the fighting spirit of the members. Charges have been laid against Al Iacobelli, former VP of Fiat Chrysler, and Monica Morgan, wife of former UAW VP General Holiefield. (Holiefield himself was not indicted because he died in 2015.) Charges may be laid against other company and union officials.

Despite Fiat Chrysler and UAW claims, this is not the result of a few corrupt individuals—it is the inevitable consequence of decades of a culture of class collaboration.

The problem is union leaders who start to identify more with corporate executives than with the workers, and who see union office as a path to self-enrichment.

This also raises questions about the 2016 negotiations between GM and Unifor, representing Canadian GM workers—since Iacobelli was a leading member of the GM management team. (GM had hired Iacobelli after he “left” Fiat Chrysler).

“Fat, dumb and happy”

Iacobelli and Holiefield conspired over at least six years to both enrich themselves, and also, to pay off other top UAW reps, in what was described as an effort to keep the union reps “fat, dumb and happy.” The brazen theft involved diverting funds from the negotiated National Training Center (NTC) to pay for such things as a Ferrari Spider (\$350,000) and two solid-gold Mont Blanc pens (\$37,500 each) for Iacobelli, and paying off the

mortgage on the house owned by Morgan and Holiefield (\$262,219). But the most important lesson to learn is that the source of the corruption was the culture of labor-management cooperation, or “team-concept” that has spread like a cancer through the North American labor movement.

Jointly-administered slush fund

Fiat Chrysler contributed between \$13 million and \$31 million-per-year to the NTC, a joint company-union program that was supposed to provide education and training for union members. Corrupt practices were made easier because the fund was designed to serve as a slush fund, jointly administered by Iacobelli and Holiefield with no oversight. Funds were siphoned off directly to pay for air travel and lavish hotel suites including a four-night stay for Holiefield (at \$3,100 per night) in the Beverly Hills Hotel in California. Credit cards were issued to senior UAW negotiators, as described in this *Detroit Free Press* account on July 27:

“Starting in 2012, Iacobelli saw to it that Holiefield and other senior UAW officials obtained National Training Center credit cards. He directed Durden [a Fiat Chrysler financial analyst] to obtain the cards. The financial analyst obliged. And the union officials were encouraged to use them for personal expense. According to the indictment, Durden reported that he, Iacobelli and others at FCA ‘had created a liberal spending policy for the NTC-issued credit cards as part of their effort to keep the senior members of the UAW Chrysler Department (fat, dumb and happy.)’ The cards were used liberally. The indictment alleges Holiefield made more than \$200,000 in personal purchases on his credit card, includ-

ing jewelry, furniture, designer clothing and other items. Iacobelli authorized the charges. Durden collected Holiefield's credit card statements, instructing members of the NTC accounting staff 'not to open, examine or review the NTC credit card statements.'"

Phony children's charity

Even more distasteful was the fact that Holiefield created a fake children's charity, the "Leave the Lights on Foundation." Iacobelli funneled hundreds-of-thousands of dollars from the NTC through the foundation to Holiefield and Monica Morgan. Companies owned by Morgan received money from the foundation and from the NTC, including getting the contract to provide T-shirts, mugs and other items to the NTC without submitting a quote or a bid. Most of that money went to Morgan and Holiefield's lavish personal expenses. In the words of Fiat Chrysler's financial analyst Durden, the payments were "an investment in relationship building" with Holiefield.

Two-tier wages and brutal ten-hour shifts

What did Fiat Chrysler get in return for this investment? As reported by David Barkholz in the *Automotive News* June 9, 2015:

"FCA negotiated the best contract of the Detroit 3. FCA's overall labor costs since the four-year UAW contract was signed in the fall 2011 have nudged up less than one percent per year. Consequently, FCA enjoys nearly a \$10-an-hour labor cost advantage over Ford and GM."

In addition, Fiat Chrysler gained the union's support in implementing a brutal Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) of regular ten-hour days with no overtime pay. The AWS is also known as the 3-2-120 schedule, because three crews work two shifts for 120 hours a week. For example, at the Jefferson North Assembly plant in

Detroit, the "A" crew works ten hours a day on day shift from 6:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Thursday. The "B" crew works ten hours on night shift 6:00 P.M. to 4:30 A.M. on Wednesday through Saturday. The "C" crew works ten hours on the night shift Monday and Tuesday and ten hours on the day shift Friday and Saturday.

What is desperately needed are union leaders who understand that "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common"—and that their role is to fight for the working class.

Both Fiat Chrysler and the UAW now claim that the corruption was just the acts of individuals. They both say they "didn't know." But Holiefield and the other UAW reps at Fiat Chrysler were not acting on their own in capitulating to management demands. The concessions they made were part of the overall strategy of concession bargaining followed by the UAW leadership for many years. In 2007 the UAW had agreed to allow the auto companies to hire second-tier workers at half the regular rate with inferior benefits and no pensions. Even before that, the UAW leadership had argued that workers had common interests with the corporations, and that they had to help keep the companies "healthy" and profitable by implementing "team concept." The UAW had agreed to joint programs and joint funds back in the early 1980s. Since management still made the decisions, this so-called "team concept" just meant the union became tied in to enforcing those decisions. It was just a capitulation to the

corporations, who always strive to maximize their profits, pay workers the least they can get away with, and speed up the work until it is destroying the health of the workers. What is desperately needed are union leaders who understand that "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common"—and that their role is to fight for the working class.

CAW/Unifor leaders also cozy up to corporate execs

Instead of fighters, we have union officials who would rather rub shoulders with corporate executives and their political lapdogs than associate with the workers. This has been the case with the autoworkers in Canada as well. Former Canadian Auto Workers President, Buzz Hargrove swooned when he got a pat on the head from Magna head Frank Stronach—and gave him the infamous no-strike agreement in return. This was a pattern with Buzz—he liked to chum around with corporate execs, like ONEX head Gerry Schwartz. After Buzz was taken on a tour of Israel at Schwartz's expense, he turned into an apologist for the Israeli onslaught on Gaza. Later, Buzz delighted in putting a union jacket on then Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin.

In 2013 the CAW merged with the CEP and formed Unifor. The current Unifor president, Jerry Dias is following the same political path as Hargrove. He is smitten with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and supports the Ontario Liberal government of Kathleen Wynne. Last year at a General Motors photo op announcement in Oshawa, attended by Trudeau and Wynne, Jerry refused to sit with members of the union local (Unifor Local 222) because he wanted to be as close as possible to the GM executives and Trudeau. A few months later, at the Oshawa ratification meeting for the new GM contract, Jerry was being questioned by a member of Unifor Local 222 who was calmly asking a rea-

sonable question. His response was “You’re a f---ing idiot.”

Is Al Jerry’s pal?

Most disturbingly—listen to Jerry’s response to the charges of fraud against Al Iacobelli:

“Jerry Dias, president of Unifor, the union that negotiated with Iacobelli for Canadian autoworker contracts, said he always viewed him as a professional labor executive.

“I’ve probably known Al for 15 years.... This is right out of left field. I never would have expected it,” Dias said. “I’m in shock, to say the least.”

Could Jerry really have been totally unaware of the corrupt dealings between Iacobelli and UAW reps? He says he was “shocked”—Unifor members would like to know if he was also angry and working to prevent similar events here. There was widespread opposition to the 2016 contracts between Unifor and the auto companies. Many members were angry that new hires on the assembly line start at \$15-per-hour less than longer-term workers, and won’t get equal pay for more than ten years. They also get an inferior pension. The ratification votes at all three companies were the lowest in the history of the Canadian union. Did Jerry’s demonstrated chumminess

with corporate leaders and Liberal politicians influence what was negotiated?

UAW and Fiat Chrysler cover-ups

After Iacobelli was indicted, Fiat Chrysler said they had fired him when they became aware of his fraud. But at the time Iacobelli left, they were happy to leave the impression that he had retired. Similarly, the UAW allowed Holiefield to serve out his term of office and retire with a pension in 2014, even though there had persistent complaints about Holiefield’s corruption for years. Even the indictment mentions that the then UAW President had cautioned Holiefield and Iacobelli over their financial dealings in 2011. Both the corporation and the union preferred to cover things up to preserve their public image.

Now that the indictments have come down, both the company and the union swear that the corruption had no influence on negotiations between the two. If you believe that, you must believe that Brian Mulrone had provided nothing in return for the three envelopes containing \$300,000 in cash that Karlheinz Schreiber handed him in hotel rooms.

But the biggest thing that the UAW leadership and Fiat Chrysler want to cover-up, is that their dedication to

“labor-management cooperation” is to the benefit of the corporation and is against the interests of the union members. If the union had a culture of uncompromising struggle against the corporate elite, the union official that wanted to rub shoulders with executives and flaunt a lavish lifestyle would have stuck out like a sore thumb.

—CounterPunch, August 25, 2017

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/08/25/fiat-chrysleruaw-corruption-case-shows-how-labor-management-cooperation-profits-the-companies/>

Continued from Inside Front CoverC

Virginia removed an astonishing 41,637 voters based on Kobach’s accusation they could have voted twice. Not one of the accused was arrested—but, you won’t be surprised to hear, the list of the “scrubbed” was filled with African-American names. And Virginia is removing tens-of-thousands more with this Jim Crow tactic—despite a nominally Democratic Governor, Terry McAuliffe.

Virginia refused us their “scrub” lists. But Zach Roberts, by stellar investigative work, obtained a copy—half-a-million names in all—much to the state’s dismay. And those lists are every bit as obscenely racist and, in the long run, far more wounding, than the iron rods of the neo-Nazis.

So, thank you, Zach, for the photos that bear witness and inside documents that reveal their secret schemes.

For the rest of us, our job is simpler: not to look away.

Greg Palast is the Director and Zach D. Roberts the Associate Producer of The Best Democracy Money Can Buy, a film about racial vote suppression and billionaires behind it.

—Greg Palast, August 14, 2017

<http://www.gregpalast.com/charlottesville-gun-face-got-photo/#more-13681>



Bob King (UAW President), General Holiefield (UAW VP), Scott Gaberding (Fiat Chrysler), Al Iacobelli (Fiat Chrysler) at the opening of 2011 negotiations.

Trump and America's Fascist Forefathers

By Glen Ford

Donald Trump was even more agitated and combative than usual at Tuesday's press conference. How could he draw a line to separate the "neo-Nazis" and assorted "white supremacists" that had descended on Charlottesville, Virginia—one of whom used his car to crush the life out of a young woman—and the "very fine people" that favored keeping Robert E. Lee's statue on its pedestal in (recently renamed) Emancipation Park? And, where would the racist-removal project end?

The answer, as somebody once said, was blowing in the wind. "So this week, it is Robert E. Lee," warned Trump. "I noticed that Stonewall Jackson is coming down. I wonder, is it George Washington next week? And is it Thomas Jefferson the week after? You know, you really do have to ask yourself, where does it stop?"

There is nothing wrong with Trump's logic. If the legacy of slavery is to be excised root and branch, then nothing less than the most profound social transformation is in order. Why stop with statues of long dead men? If you rightly condemn Washington and Jefferson as loathsome oppressors of humanity, you are then obligated to purge the nation and world of the poisoned fruit of their racist perversion.

What these forefathers "brought forth on this continent" was "a new nation, conceived" NOT in liberty, nor was it dedicated to the proposition that all men were created equal. According to Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's Dred Scott decision, the United States was founded as a white man's country in which "neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instru-

ment" (the Declaration of Independence).

In 1857, when Taney made his ruling, the value of U.S. slaves was greater than every other national asset except the land within its borders—land that was itself stolen from the indigenous peoples, and much of which would be valueless without slave labor. The super-profits of the slave production system had made the United States a global economic power, the second great industrial power on Earth—right behind Britain, where U.S. slave-produced cotton was the engine of its globalizing juggernaut. Through ruthless exploitation of captive Black bodies, writes Edward Baptist in *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*, "the United States seized control of the world market for cotton, the key raw material of the Industrial Revolution, and became a wealthy nation of global influence."

U.S. imperialism is rooted in the rapacious expansionism of the slave system. George Washington envisioned the new nation as a "rising empire." Jefferson spoke of an "empire of liberty"—meaning, the liberties he enjoyed from the labor (and sexual exploitation) of the slaves. White supremacy legitimized every avarice of the new nation. The Monroe Doctrine staked the exclusive U.S. claim to dominate the Western Hemisphere—regarded as populated by inferior and "mongrel" races—an "exceptionalism" Washington now insists extends to the entire planet.

Fascism, including the Nazi variety, is not some strange European social disease. After crushing Black Reconstruction, the southern states invented, from the bottom up, the world's first totally racially regimented society. U.S. "Jim Crow" inspired

Adolph Hitler's vision for nation-building under Aryan supremacy, as documented in James Q. Whitman's recent book, *Hitler's American Model*. American fascism predated—and has long outlived—the European variety.

Continued from Inside Back Cover

"Mr. Johnson, you have been a very fortunate man in that you have been blessed by having extraordinary counsel represent you," Clark said.

The judge then announced, "You are a free man," prompting applause from the dozens of people in the gallery.

Johnson was just steps from the courthouse exit when he was asked how it felt to finally taste freedom after so many years.

"You get numb after a while. I've been fighting this for 22 years," he replied. "I'm moving on from here."

Johnson was on his way home when Attorney General Josh Shapiro released a statement on the outcome of the case.

"Mr. Johnson was not the principal actor in the murder. He served 22 years in prison without any significant misconduct. During his brief release from prison in 2012 he conducted himself responsibly, and voluntarily returned to prison when directed to do so by the court," the AG wrote.

"I believe the agreement approved today serves the cause of justice and the best interests of the people of our Commonwealth," Shapiro said.

Williams family declined to comment on Johnson's release.

—*Pennsylvania Real-Time News*, July 11, 2017

http://www.pennlive.com/news/2017/07/i_had_to_end_their_pain_lorenz.html#incart_river_index

It is generally accepted that fascist states are characterized, to one degree or another, by:

- Extreme nationalism
- Frequent resort to mob rule
- Oppression of an internal “Other” as an organizing principle
- Militarism
- The political dominance of the most reactionary elements of the bourgeoisie

All of these characteristics describe the southern states of the U.S. during

the nearly century-long period between the death of Reconstruction and the triumph of the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, the post-Reconstruction reconciliation between North and South guaranteed that the southern fascism model would leave its imprint on the larger American political economy. In the aftermath of the Sixties, the Republican section of the corporate electoral duopoly assumed the role of the White Man’s Party—the purer party of indigenous American fascism.

The Democratic Party, which founded this homegrown fascism, was

now popularly identified as a haven for the nation’s racial and ethnic “Others.” However, the Democrats continued to pursue national reconciliation, as did the Republicans during the old Jim Crow. Even as the two parties were switching racial constituencies, they found common cause in imposing a “New” Jim Crow—the mass Black incarceration regime that spread to all parts of the country with astounding speed at the close of the Sixties, and which is the most dramatic domestic expression of American fascism. The Democrats and Republicans are as

close as “lips and teeth,” as the Chinese say, when it comes to U.S. imperialism. They both belong to the War Party, committed to unfettered U.S. expansion and endless warfare against the darker peoples of the world—a national mission that began with Washington and Jefferson, and must be undone.

Donald Trump warned that, by knocking the icons off their pedestals, “You are changing history, you’re changing culture.”

Not quite—but it’s a small start.

—*Black Agenda Report*, August 17, 2017

<https://blackagenda.com/trump-and-america-fascist-forefathers>

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Social Security, the 14th Amendment and “Odious Debt”

BY DR. NAYVIN GORDON

For decades working people have been paying millions more than was needed into Social Security and for years the excess money has been borrowed by the government. Presently there is almost \$3 trillion owed by the government to the Social Security Trust Fund. The Republican Party now controls the government and has a budget plan that will give less than was promised to millions of people who have paid excess into Social Security for years.¹ This proposed budget is in fact a default on the debt owed to the Social Security Trust Fund and the people of the United States. The proposed Republican budget cut to Social Security is a violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The 14th amendment reads as follows: “the validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, includes debts incurred for payments of pensions...shall not be questioned.”

For decades the politicians have not only borrowed from Social Security to run the government, but 70 percent of the national debt has been borrowed from banks, financial institutions, corporations and rich individuals. The politicians borrowed because instead of taxing the rich banks and corporations, they cut their taxes. As a result, workers taxes and Social Security payments provide almost 90 percent of the federal government’s revenue.² Over decades the politicians have allowed major corporations to escape paying billions in taxes, they have given subsidies in the billions to corporations and agribusiness, and they have allowed tax breaks for the oil and gas companies in the billions of dollars.³ The Government has also spent trillions of dollars for multiple wars and on bailing out banks and insurance companies.

Politicians have borrowed money and spent it on the military industrial complex. Over half the national budget goes to the military in spite of the fact that over the past 46 years the general population has been opposed to the government’s decision to spend so much money on the military,⁴ and have repeatedly indicated that they would rather the money be spent on social services, healthcare and education.

A 2014 study by Princeton University came to the conclusion that the majority of the American public actually has little influence over the policies the government adopts. The study concluded that “economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impact on U.S. government policies while the average citizen have little or no independent influence.”⁵

Politicians now tell us that there is too much debt and they want to pay off the creditors rather than provide public service to the average citizen. This debt is clearly against the interests of the general population. This debt was

obtained without the people’s consent and with the full awareness of the creditors. Thus this fulfills the International Legal Definition of an “odious debt”. We the people have no obligation to pay and consider this debt invalid. We will not pay this debt; the rich who benefited from this debt must repay it!

Stand together for a stronger, improved and expanded Social Security!

Dr. Gordon is a Family Physician in California who has written many articles on Health and Politics.

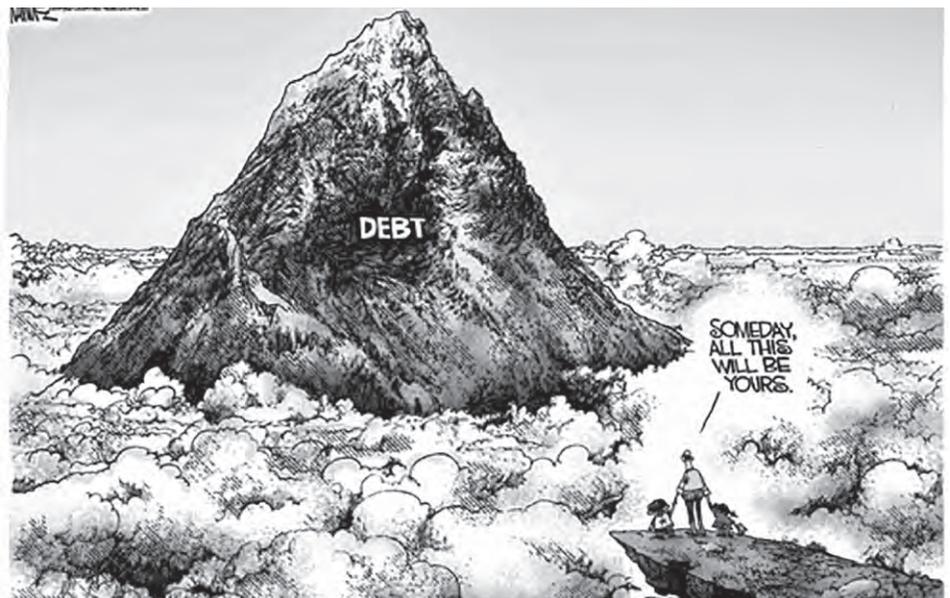
1 *New York Times*, July 19, 2017

2 The White House Office of Management and Budget, “Historical Tables,” Table 2.1 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals/>

3 “Take The Rich of Welfare,” by Mark Zepezaur and Arthur Naiman, 1996; *The New York Times*, March 10, 2017

4 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181628/americans-split-defense-spending.aspx>

5 “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens,” by Martin Gilens, and Benjamin I. Page, *American Political Science Association* 2014



Make the Rich Pay the National Debt

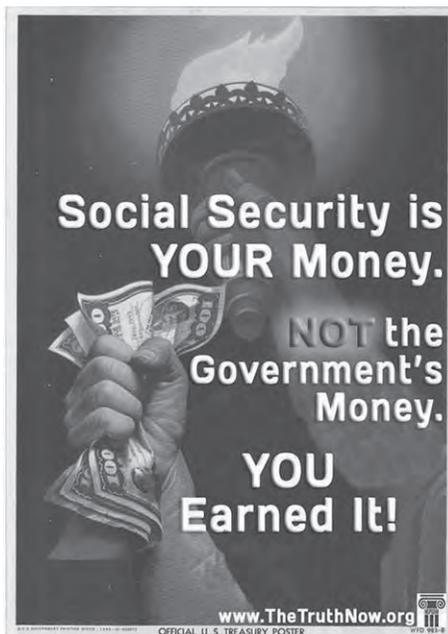
Stop the neo-fascist “Freedom Caucus” threats to default on our Social Security Program—
make the Rich pay down the National Debt Now!

BY DR. NAYVIN GORDON

Fascism: a political movement of nationalism, racism, militarism, sexism, xenophobia....

According to the August 7, 2017 *New York Times*, the neo-fascist Freedom Caucus “is fixated on cutting entitlement spending” and if these cuts are not made, “they’ll refuse to vote on raising the debt ceiling.”¹

The Government owes the Social Security Trust Fund three trillion dollars that they have borrowed over the last decades. They have used the money to fund endless wars and bailout big banks and corporations. Now the politicians want to cut \$72 billion from Social Security Disability Insurance (S.S.D.I.) to pay back other debts they owe to the banks, corporations and Wall Street financial institutions. Politicians borrowed billions for years because they have given massive tax breaks and subsidies to the rich, corpo-



rations and banks, who now sit on over two trillion dollars in cash.²

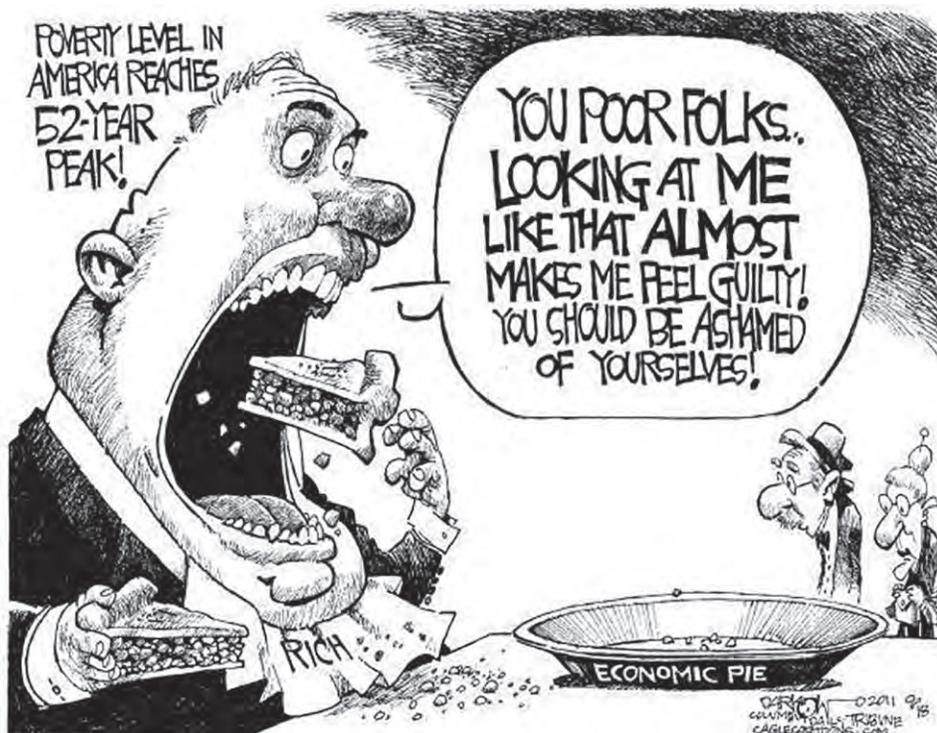
The Republican’s monstrous plan is to pay back the debt to the rich and to default on the Government’s debt to the American wage earners.

A default on S.S.D.I. would most severely affect the most vulnerable, poor and minorities.³ This program covers severely disabled workers, such as those with kidney failure and the blind. We cannot allow this racist cut-back to happen. Such a brutal budget proposal brings to mind the horrible history of German Nazi extermination of the disabled, because they were considered “useless eaters.”⁴ The rich, who are hoarding trillions of dollars, must pay for the capitalist economic crisis that they helped to create!

“Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” —Edmond Burke⁵

Millions in motion can protect and expand Social Security. Now, let’s get organized.

Dr. Nayvin Gordon is a family physician living in Oakland, California; he has written many articles on health and politics.



1 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/07/opinion/debt-ceiling-congress-default-real.html>

2 <http://www.countercurrents.org/2017/06/28/dont-buy-the-national-deficit-debt-scam-that-steals-from-working-people/>

3 <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v62n2/v62n2p59.pdf>

4 <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=7019>

5 <https://monthlyreview.org/2017/04/01/neofascism-in-the-white-house/>

Democratic Socialists of America

The DSA grows to 21,000—toward a new socialist party

BY PHILIP LOCKER

Socialist Viewpoint has been running articles from various socialist organizations. This one on the Democratic Socialists of America is by a member of Socialist Alternative.

We are witnessing the largest opening to build the socialist movement in the U.S. in decades and it is not just leftists who recognize it. *National Review*, a leading right-wing journal, published a breathless warning in March titled “Socialism’s Rising Popularity Threatens America’s Future” by David Nammo, CEO of the Christian Legal Society.

The clearest manifestation of this shift was seen in the enormous support for Bernie Sanders, the self-described socialist, who is now the most popular politician in the country. Nammo correctly points out that Sanders is “not the cause of this movement in public opinion but rather an indicator of it.”

This rising support for socialism is driven by a growing disillusionment with capitalism. Of course, what is understood by the term “socialism” is still quite vague and limited but it is not meaningless. Support for government intervention in the form of universal social programs like Medicare for All and free college, paid for by taxing the rich, has grown—especially among young people.

DSA grows in the era of Trump

It is against this background that we have seen a significant growth of organized socialist forces, especially the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). As part of the outpouring of protest against Trump, DSA has grown from around 8,500 on Election Day to about 21,000 as of early May. It is the largest socialist formation in the U.S. since the 1960s, and it is well positioned to grow further.

Socialist Alternative welcomes that thousands of people are building a broad socialist organization. We are excited to work together with DSA members and all others interested in socialist ideas to build the socialist and anti-Trump movements in a non-sectarian fashion while honestly discussing political differences.

Historically, DSA was an anti-communist, social-democratic trend that was committed to a long-term strategy of transforming the Democratic Party. Following the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011, DSA began to change from an organization in decline when a layer of younger, more radical elements around the newly-launched journal *Jacobin* joined.

In 2015, DSA threw itself energetically into the Sanders campaign, laying the basis for its explosive growth following Trump’s victory. In this new situation, the DSA became a rallying point for many left-wing Sandernistas who were outraged by the failure of Clinton to defeat Trump. Its socialist profile and being seen as an inclusive organization strengthened its attraction to these elements looking to remain active.

DSA is an evolving organization. Within it are a wide range of views on a variety of issues. There remains an important section of DSA that still maintains its traditional politics. But it appears that this wing is now a minority and that the new people joining are largely supportive of the more left-wing current around *Jacobin*. DSA’s convention in August will help clarify its politics in this new situation.

Among the new people joining DSA, the majority despises the Democratic Party establishment and is enthusiastic about building a broad-

based socialist movement. Some share the position of Socialist Alternative that we should work outside the Democratic Party as part of a strategy of building a mass, membership based left-wing party.

But the DSA majority sentiment is more “pragmatic,” seeing the question of participation within the Democrats as a tactical issue. This coincides with the dominant mood on the left for a “Tea Party of the left” strategy.

Political clarity needed

The growth of DSA will pose real questions and challenges for how it should use its new influence to advance the struggle. Events will require a fuller discussion and debate about what ideas and program are necessary to successfully build a new socialist movement on a solid, principled basis that can avoid repeating the failures of previous mass left formations.

Is their vision of socialism a social-democratic model where capitalism remains intact but with a strong welfare state? Marxists fight for every reform we can squeeze out of the ruling class, but we recognize that these reforms are fundamentally incompatible with capitalism in the long run as shown by the huge neoliberal attacks taking place in Europe. We link the fight for reforms to the need for a fundamental transformation of society which breaks the power of capital and establishes a new social order based on mass, democratic institutions of workers and the oppressed.

More immediately, as a larger force, what will DSA actually do? What will its policy be in the debates that break out in the anti-Trump movement? Will DSA run its own candidates independently of the Democratic Party or within the Democratic primaries? How

will DSA hold them accountable when they get elected or when they get elected to leadership positions in social movements? Does the DSA have a way to combat the huge pressures towards opportunism and careerism that such positions inevitably create?

New left forces can fall into crisis, sometimes quite rapidly, if they fail to get these questions right by measuring up to the needs of the situation, as has been shown with the Chavistas in Venezuela or Respect in England and Wales.

The history of the past 100 years of the international workers' movement has shown the power of an organized movement to win huge reforms. However, it also graphically demonstrated the bankruptcy of the ideas and strategy of reformism: the historically dominant political approach on the left of trying to fit the needs of workers and the oppressed within the framework of capitalism, or arguing that a socialist society can be gradually established using the existing "democratic" mechanisms of capitalist society.

In this existing class society you can't please both the billionaires and working people. Those who try to appease the capitalists and workers tend to end up trying to limit workers' aspirations and demobilize their movements.

The example of SYRIZA in Greece is only the most glaring illustration of the complete inability of reformism to meet the needs of the working class in this era of capitalist decay.

That is why, in our view, a cohesive Marxist organization is needed that can systematically argue for revolutionary socialist policies within the wider movement. *Socialist Alternative* is working to build such a Marxist force while collaborating with all genuine elements to also build a broader left.

For a new socialist party

Despite the huge threat of Trump's attacks, the enormous movement of resistance has opened a new period of

mass politicization with huge opportunities for the left.

Socialist Alternative urges DSA to take advantage of its rapid growth and dynamism to use this potential to launch a new, broad, democratic Socialist Party. In our view, there is an opening to bring together the best forces on the left, and, more importantly, a new generation that is actively looking to fight for socialism.

With a bold lead from DSA, a new party of 50,000 to 100,000 members could be rapidly built. Of course, without further steps toward political clarification of key strategic issues, such a formation would have an unstable character. Nevertheless, this would represent a qualitative step forward for the socialist movement.

A new party should have a broad, federal-type character, allowing organizations coming from different backgrounds to affiliate with full democratic rights. *Socialist Alternative* will bring our political ideas to the discussions in such a formation. It would allow different trends to join forces while collectively discussing and testing out the best way to build a fighting, socialist pole within the broader movement.

A new Socialist Party would need to be a party of struggle. Our key power in this society comes from organized collective action. A new party should also boldly run candidates independent of corporate cash and independent of the corporate-controlled Democratic Party.

Such a force could act as a forerunner for a much larger mass party when wider layers of the working class come to the conclusion that the Democratic Party is fundamentally a big-business party and move to build their own political party.

The rapid growth of DSA is an exciting sign of the radicalization taking place in U.S. society. A sense of urgency is needed to fully seize this

opportunity. Combined with a determined struggle to achieve the necessary political understanding, program, and strategy, we can rebuild a powerful socialist force as a key part of the developing resistance to Trump and the billionaire class.

—*Socialist Alternative*, July 5, 2017

<https://www.socialistalternative.org/2017/07/05/dsa-grows-21000-socialist-party/>

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USA—Nuclear Mass Murderer

Every U.S. president makes unilateral nuclear threats. It's an American tradition

BY BRUCE A. DIXON

August 9, 2017—This week marks the anniversary of two monstrous war crimes, the nuking of two undefended Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, 1945. The fake history I learned as a child in the '50s and '60s was that the bombings saved the lives of a million Japanese and Americans who would have perished in a land invasion of Japan. That was a lie. The U.S. anticipated turning its World War II ally, the Soviet Union, into its postwar enemy, and hoped to scare the Soviets with the terrible carnage its new nuclear weapons would inflict.

The hundreds-of-thousands murdered at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the opening acts of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union—the beginning of a U.S. nuclear-armed crime wave which has lasted over 70 years and included each and every U.S. president from Harry Truman to Donald Trump. This isn't hype and it's not exaggeration. When you rob someone and tell your victim you've got a gun, you're charged with armed robbery whether or not you pull or use the weapon.

By that standard, the U.S. has been a rogue nation on a nuclear-armed crime spree now in its eighth decade. A few years ago the American Friends Service Committee compiled a partial list of the times U.S. presidents have openly threatened humanity with nuclear destruction. You can find it by Googling "American Friends Service Committee" and "nuclear blackmail." Here are a few of the dozens of incidents it lists.

- In 1946 and 1948 President Harry Truman threatened the Soviets over Iran and Berlin, respectively, and the Chinese in 1950 and 51.

- President Eisenhower also threatened the Chinese over Korea in 1953, and again in 1956 over Quemoy and Matsu. He offered the French nukes to use against the Vietnamese at Dienbienphu in 1954.
- President Kennedy threatened a nuclear strike at the Soviets over Berlin, and sent nuclear-armed missiles to Turkey on the Russian border in 1961. Though these were later wisely withdrawn after the nuclear standoff of the Cuban missile crisis, the U.S. has consistently based its nukes on its fleets and bases in the Pacific, in Europe and Asia, and for decades in South Korea.
- Presidents Johnson and Nixon menaced North Korea, Vietnam and the Soviet Union with air and seaborne nukes, and President Gerald Ford ordered nuclear-armed bombers from Guam to loiter for an extended time off the coast of North Korea.
- Jimmy Carter issued the Carter Doctrine, reaffirmed by Ronald Reagan which committed the U.S. to a nuclear response if its vital interests in the Middle East were ever threatened.
- Ronald Reagan terrified the world, though he did briefly consider a lasting arms treaty with the USSR.
- Bush 1, Bush 2 and Bill Clinton all menaced North Korea and Iraq, and Obama declared "all options on the table" against Iran.

The AFSC list does not include vital U.S. assistance in developing nuclear weapons technology given to apartheid

South Africa which later relinquished its nukes, and apartheid Israel, which currently has missiles aimed at every Arab capital within a thousand miles, and at Iran.

So while Donald Trump's "fire and destruction" bombast is criminal and detestable, it's not new. It's merely the latest installment in a long running crime wave by the planet's number one nuclear-armed felon, the United States of America.

U.S.A. Let's make it great again.

—*Black Agenda Report*, August 9, 2017

<https://blackagendareport.com/every-us-president-makes-unilateral-nuclear-threats-its-american-tradition>

**the U.S. has
been a rogue
nation on a
nuclear-armed
crime spree now
in its eighth
decade**

Rashid Will Not Be Silenced!

Kevin “Rashid” Johnson—transferred to Florida and thrown in solitary for publicizing abuses

BY CAROLE SELIGMAN

Editors’ note: This is an update on Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, whose artwork and articles exposing prison abuse in four different states where he has been imprisoned—Virginia, Oregon, Texas, and now, Florida—have been published in this magazine over several years. It is based on two articles by Rashid.¹

Kevin “Rashid” Johnson was “unceremoniously packed off to Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) on June 22, 2017” from Clements Unit in Amarillo, Texas, to the Reception and Medical Center (RMC) in Lake Butler, Florida. In an article titled “I’m Off to Florida and a New Phase of Reprisals

for Publishing Abuses in U.S. Prisons,” Rashid describes a horrifying “welcoming committee.”

“I was brought from the van, manacled hand and foot into an enclosed vehicle port, where I was met by a mob of white guards of all ranks. I was ordered to stand in a pair of painted yellow footprints on a concrete platform as the guards crowded around me.

“Their ‘chosen’ spokesman... stepped forward and launched into a speech consisting of threats and insults. He emphasized that I was ‘not in Virginia or wherever else’ I’d been. That ‘this is Florida, and we’ll beat your ass! We’ll kill you!’ He assured my ‘Black ass,’ that my tendency to protest ‘won’t be tolerated here.’ He went on and on, like an overseer explaining the plantation’s code of decorum and the ‘place’ to a newly arrived Black slave. The analogy is apt. ‘You will answer us only as ‘no sir’ and ‘yes sir,’ ‘no ma’am’ and ‘yes ma’am’ You forget this and we’ll kick your fucking teeth out,’ he barked.”

Rashid was brought before the “gang investigator” also known as the “Security Threat Group [STG]” investigator, who “admitted his purpose was to put an STG profile on me, refer it to FDC’s central office in Tallahassee to be upheld, and then be put on STG file, which would be used to stop my writings.” The investigator explained to Rashid that he knew all about his published articles about prison abuses and assured him that FDC “would put an end to it.” The investigator attempted to get Rashid to characterize himself and the New Afrikan Black Panther Party, his organization, as a “gang!”



A constitutionally protected organization

Rashid explained that he is “a member of a constitutionally protected, non-violent communist party” and that the false charges the investigator was making were typical of fascist governments and would be addressed publicly and in court.

During Rashid’s time at the RMC, in which he was placed in the solitary confinement unit in a hot, filthy insect-infested cell with no bunk, no fan, and a commode that had to be flushed by a guard outside the cell, he was labeled and treated as “an extreme physical threat.”

For several days he was denied his blood pressure medication, which caused him to collapse and be hospitalized.

On July 6, Rashid was notified that he would be formally reviewed for placement on Close Management status—the FDC’s name for solitary confinement. The reason given—dangerous gang leader—was to justify suppressing Rashid’s writings documenting prison abuses.

Rashid reminds his readers that this gang affiliation label is the same one that prompted “three historic hunger strikes in 2011 and 2013 and the successful class action lawsuit outlawing prolonged solitary confinement for it in 2014.”

He writes: “So, according to FDC officials I am a confirmed gang leader because I publicize prison abuses through articles that are posted online and my gang members and followers are members of the public who read my articles and make complaints and inquiries of officials, which acts are characterized as presenting disruptions to prison operations.” This, he reminds us, is all in writing, “and should you [the reader] protest, you will be labeled a gangster yourself.”

Protesting being thrown in solitary

A second article by Rashid from Florida is titled “Thrown in Solitary for Publicizing Abuses.”

He reports that on July 14, the hearing took place by the Florida DOC Institutional Classification Team (ICT). At this hearing the original charge of being a gang leader was amended to say that Rashid’s published reports of prison abuse and the public complaints resulting from these writings “somehow resulted in, or could have resulted in, serious physical injury to someone.” Although Rashid gave a written statement refuting the actions of the FDC assigning him to solitary confinement, and outlining the illegalities of the FDC and ICT actions, he was thrown in solitary.

Florida Department of Corrections officials are not only lawless, but their actions and intentions against me are racist, politically intolerant and overall unconstitutional

Rashid’s statement to the hearing begins: “The CM recommendation and supporting comments show that Florida Department of Corrections officials are not only lawless, but their actions and intentions against me are racist, politically intolerant and overall unconstitutional.”

His statement goes on to:

- Put the gang profiling of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party in the context of the racial and political oppression of Blacks in the U.S. South;
- Cite U.S. Supreme Court decisions upholding political expression and association for minority dissident groups;
- Expose the gang profiling of the NABPP as a practice of open rac-

ism and political intolerance, quoting U.S. Supreme Court Justice Black’s 1959 statement that “History should teach us...that... minority parties and groups which advocate extremely unpopular social or governmental innovations will always be typed as criminal gangs and attempts will be made to drive them out.”

- Cite that FDC officials are allowed to join the Democrat and Republican Parties even though President Trump “is a known racist, housing discriminator, habitual sexual assaulter of women, and has neo-Nazis like Steve Bannon as key advisers of his administration.”
- Cite his being “targeted for indefinite solitary confinement...for my political association/expression/affiliation with the NABPP and publicizing...prison abuses.
- Cite FDC’s statement that his writings are “a threat to security.”
- State that the prison “admitted that the actual reason I’ve been interstate transferred now and in the past is because of my publicizing abuses.”
- Cite five court cases upholding the free speech and expression rights of prisoners;
- Cite as “ridiculous” the prison’s portrayal as gang activity that the public reads his prison writings and has protested the conditions and abuses he’s reported, again citing court cases upholding prisoners’ rights to petition the government for redress of grievances.

He concludes, “Apparently I’m being treated like an ‘enemy combatant’ being secretly renditioned to ‘Black Site’ prisons. This all shows that FDC officials are perversely and absurdly twisting perfectly legal and constitutionally protected actions on my, the public’s, and the media’s part, to spe-

ciously rationalize totally illegal designs on their own part.”

He writes: “...absolutely nothing is even hinted at that shows any actions by me that did, or could, cause anyone any physical harm at all. Everything I am described to have done is legal and constitutionally protected activity....”

Rashid’s conclusion

“As stated, the foregoing statement had no bearing on the ICT’s decision to throw me in solitary. In fact the hearing was only a formality—it had already been decided beforehand by the ICT and FDC’s HQ officials to put me in CM.

“Indeed, as I was being ‘escorted’ from my cell to the hearing by a Sergeant John Nyitray, he asked if my property was already packed or stored in such a way inside my cell that he could quickly put it all into a bag. I asked why, to which he replied I was going to be transferred immediately following the hearing. I’d already been told by various sources that if I was put in CM I’d likely be sent to Florida State Prison’s (FSP) CM unit, which was less than a thirty minutes drive from FDC’s

Reception and Medical Center (RMC) where I was then confined.

“It was then approaching 5:00 P.M., and only emergency transfers authorized by FDC’s HQ in Tallahassee are done at such a late hour. And so it was.

This all shows that FDC officials are perversely and absurdly twisting perfectly legal and constitutionally protected actions on my, the public’s, and the media’s part, to speciously rationalize totally illegal designs on their own part.

“Immediately following the staged ‘hearing’ where I was told by RMC’s assistant warden Polk that I have no rights, I was returned to my

cell, instructed to pack my things, and was then promptly transferred to FSP’s CM unit, where I remain. How more obvious could a corrupt conspiracy orchestrated at the highest levels of authority be? How more blatant could officials be in their designs to suppress and punish the public’s inalienable right to know what a government that professes to be theirs is up to? How more evident could it be that the government is not theirs and they must therefore rein it in and replace it with one that genuinely is of the People, by the People, for the People.”

We urge you to write to Rashid and to protest Rashid’s confinement in solitary (CM) to Warden Barry Reddish at Florida State Prison, P.O. Box 800, Raiford, FL 32083.

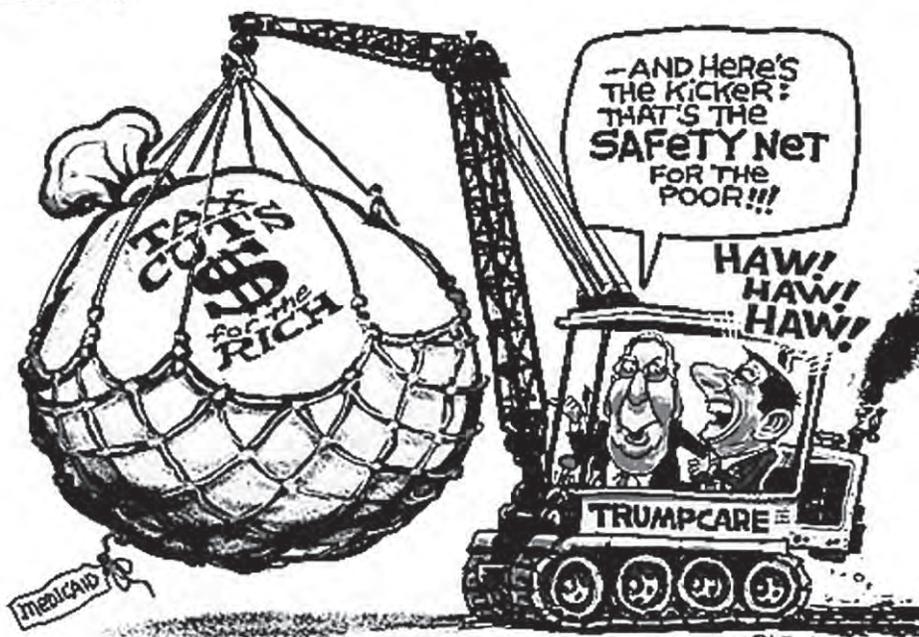
Write to Rashid at:
Kevin Johnson #158039
Florida State Prison
P.O. Box 800
Raiford, FL 32083
www.rashidmod.com

Editors of *Socialist Viewpoint*, who communicate frequently with Rashid, know that he is not receiving our letters in a timely manner. Some letters we sent a month ago have not been received. We are trying to ascertain Rashid’s health status, his ability to receive our letters, and how to help him get relief from solitary, a condition of torture that no one should endure.

1 “I’m Off to Florida and a New Phase of Reprisals for Publishing Abuses in U.S. Prisons”
<http://sfbayview.com/2017/07/rashid-im-off-to-florida-and-a-new-phase-of-reprisals-for-publicizing-abuses-in-us-prisons/>

“Thrown in Solitary for Publishing Abuses”
<http://sfbayview.com/2017/07/rashid-thrown-in-solitary-for-publicizing-abuses/>

STAR TRIBUNE
S&K



Delbert Africa Denied Parole

Given five year hit

BY THE JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY CAMPAIGN

Ona Move

Earlier Today, July 6, 2017, we received word from our Brother Delbert Africa that he was denied parole yet again and what is even more sadistic and bothersome to us is the fact that Delbert was given a five year hit. Delbert was informed in a meeting today by Parole Board Member, Leslie Grey, of the decision that he would not be paroled. This is the same Board Member who has very strong ties to law enforcement officials across the state of Pennsylvania. Ms. Grey stated again that the main reason for denial is due to the fact that Delbert is a threat to the safety of the community—the same Delbert Africa, who prison officials at SCI Dallas approach regularly, and ask to intervene and stop gang fights and gang violence in the prison—and he is deemed a threat to safety.

Delbert also stated to Ms. Grey that the community is in support of his release that's why there are petitions, letters, and phone calls all aimed at the parole board in support of parole for Delbert and other MOVE Members from members of the community all over the world. So who is this community that is threatened? We will tell you it's the law enforcement community who feels the threat and is working in conjunction with none other than The Fraternal Order Of Police. Mark Koch a former cop and lifelong member of The Fraternal Order Of Police sits on the parole board. The connection is there for people to see and people are opening their eyes and seeing this. Ms. Grey went as far as to boldly tell Delbert, next time you come back to make sure you have no write ups and the recommendation of the prison. Delbert has had the recommendation of the prison for every parole hearing since 2008.

The Parole Board has been blatantly pushing this issue of the safety of the community since 2008 with our family, yet they have done their best to sweep under the rug the issue of Former Board Member Randy Feathers a known pedophile who had to resign in the wake of his involvement in the kiddie porn scandal with disgraced former Pennsylvania Attorney General Kathleen Kane. The Pennsylvania Parole Board is indeed ensuring that MOVE Members remain in prison and also DIE in prison. We lost Phil Africa in 2015 and Merle Africa in 1998. We cannot afford to lose another one of our family members. Our next course of action will soon follow but we continuing to urge people to sign the petition urging the

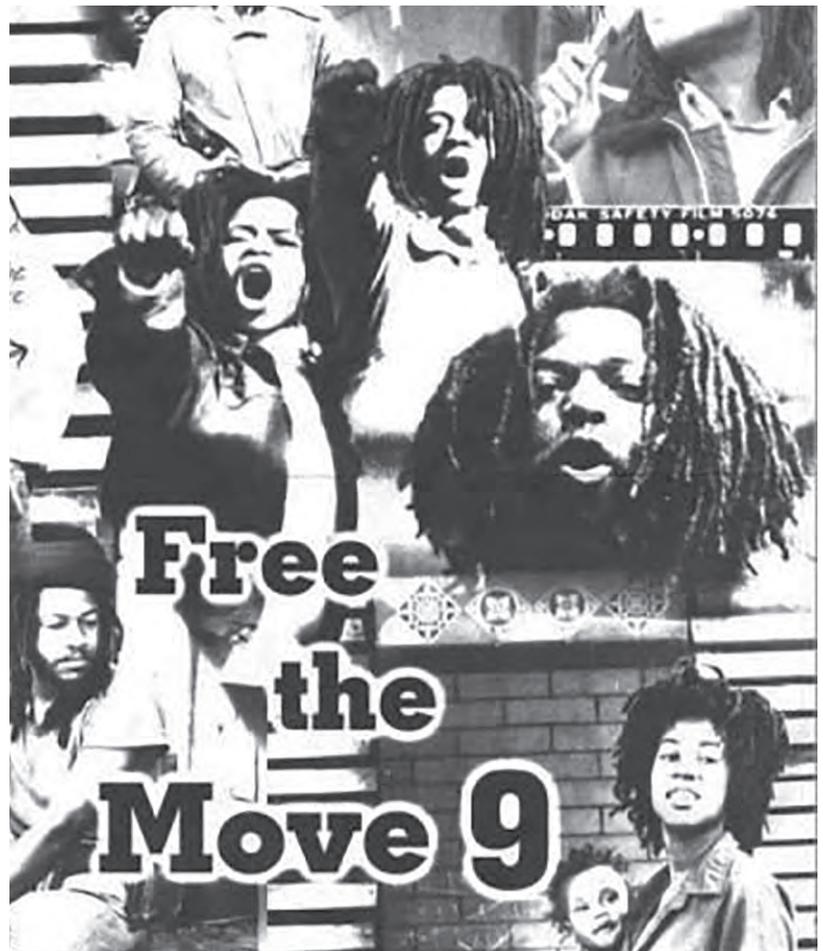
United States Justice Department To Investigate the case of The Move 9.¹

This is a long fight that we are not backing down from and are encouraging people to continue in this fight not just for our family but your family and friends and the political prisoners and all the men and women being done wrong by these parole boards across the country.

Ona Move

The Justice And Accountability Campaign

¹ Sign the petition to FREE THE MOVE 9:
<https://www.causes.com/campaigns/92454-free-the-move-9>.



August 8th—Today

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Early morning.

A time of rest, quiet and repose.

On August 8th, 1978, only the early birds in search of worms were stirring.

Also, cops assembled, heavily armed.

They attacked the MOVE House in Powelton Village, West Philadelphia, dozens, then hundreds and perhaps thousands of shots poured into the home. How could we know the number? For before night fell, the building would be shattered, razed into the dark, wet earth.

Water cannons pumped hundreds of gallons into the house, a deliberate attempt to flush MOVE people from their own communal home.

When they emerged, to escape drowning and bullets shot into the dark basement, men, women and children arose from the murky waters to find themselves facing dozens of cops, fiendishly pointing rifles and pistols at them.

Instinctively, they raised their arms to show that they weren't armed, to avoid being shot by the maddened *coterie* of cops.

Delbert Africa pulled himself out of a basement window, his arms raised above, his back and chest bare, only to be rifle-butted, slammed with a police helmet, and when he fell, pummeled, kicked repeatedly in his face and head. When he appeared in court for arraignment some hours later, his left eye looked more like a golf ball than an eyeball. Saliva ran down his chin, reflecting his broken jaw.

Almost all of the men were beaten, and what of the women?

They were driven to the banks of the Delaware River, where they heard cops arguing amongst themselves.

One cop said, "Let's rape them and throw them into the water!"

They were rerouted, and driven to the nearby House of Correction, a county prison, to await trial.

What happened to them on August 8th, the hellistic rain of police gunfire, beatings, rape threats and incarceration, was nothing compared to what

they faced in Philadelphia courtrooms, where they were denied their every right, including their alleged right to self-representation, beaten again when they refused to attend their own legal lynchings, and then, the lynchpin—convictions, and common sentences before Judge Edwin Malmed, of 30 to 100 years, for third-degree murder!

Malmed, during a phone call from me to the Frank Ford Show on *WWDB-FM* (where the judge was a guest) answered the question of who killed the cop, by saying, "I haven't the faintest idea."

Nine people. Nine men and women. Nine MOVE members—and 30 to 100 years!

Today, August 8th of 2017, marks 39 years in prison for MOVE members of which seven survive.

Merle and Phil Africa have returned to the Source, under what can only be called suspicious circumstances.

Another fact: none of the imprisoned MOVE sisters had weapons charges.

Eddie Africa was never convicted of any degree of murder! His charges? Attempted assault.

I kid you not.

MOVE members are in prison today because they were MOVE members. Period.

They are guilty of nothing—except resistance to a racist, brutal, corrupt system.

The same system that gave rise to mass incarceration on a scale that the world has never seen before.

Their sentence is an abomination.

Free Delbert, Eddie, Mike, Chuck, Janine, Janet and Debbie Africa!

—*Prison Radio*, July 19, 2017



Trump's America and Ours

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

The shockwaves from Charlottesville, Virginia, are resonating around the world. The roiling river of hatred that rolled through the city featured a panorama of paranoia—stars and bars, swastikas, Nazi regalia, Klan crosses and Trump hats. They are America's hidden face, now open for all to see. They are America.

They are the razors edge of the millions who heard Donald J. Trump's inane claim that Obama was born in Africa. This was "Trumpese" for "he is not one of us." "He's not a real American like us." Get it? Wink, wink!

This, the aging population of a dying generation, is the unseen undertow that floated Trump to the Oval Office. And to ask Trump to disavow or condemn them or their beliefs is like asking Grace to condemn jelly. It can't honestly be done for they are a part of him and he is a part of them. Thus we see Trumpism unmasked.

"Make America Great Again," indeed! Charlottesville is the illegitimate son of Charleston, South Carolina—two cities, one example—white rage on full boil—both visible, present. The grievances of people who

have been betrayed by capitalism, by corporate flight, by NAFTA, and by the turning, clicking, clock of change, has become the fuel for attacks on the eternal "other"—Blacks, Jews, Latinos, students—anyone deemed not truly white.

"Make America great again," "Make America hate again," "Make America white again"—that's Trumpism. How can Trump denounce himself?

—Prison Radio, August 13, 2017

<http://www.prisonradio.org/media/audio/mumia/trumps-america-and-ours-218-mumia-abu-jamal>

Hepatitis C Prison Wars Widen

By MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

When our recent hepatitis C case was decided (January 3, 2017), we thought that the state, known widely for its repressive penal attitudes and its cold resistance to the principle that prisoners were, after all, human beings entitled to the rights, privileges and protections inherent in human personality, would be deeply impacted.

We were correct, in a sense, for the case, *Abu-Jamal v. Wetzel*, did indeed change the legal rules of the game—at least on paper. In practice, however, the fiendish "protocol," first announced in the December 2015 hearings in our case, which stubbornly demands that people who are infected with the hepatitis C virus must be at death's door before even being considered for possible treatment, remains to this day, to be Department Of Correction's practice and procedure, despite being found unconstitutional—twice!

But beyond Pennsylvania's archaic frontiers, the case is making ripples in the lives of thousands of other prison-

ers who are suffering the ravages of Hep C (HCV), like in the state of Missouri, where prisoners Michael Postawko, Christopher Baker and Michael Jamerson filed a class action against the Missouri Department of Corrections (MDOC), claiming "inadequate medical care" for their HCV viral infections, and the refusal of MDOC and Corizon, LLC, (MDOC's healthcare provider), to treat plaintiffs with the direct-acting anti-viral known to resolve and actually cure HCV in a timely manner.

When MDOC officials filed their motions to dismiss the case, the U.S. District Court in Missouri's Western District, granted their motion in part, but also denied a huge chunk of their motion, finding that the prisoner-plaintiffs had indeed shown a "serious medical need" (HCV), that MDOC defendants showed "deliberate indifference" to their medical needs, and that the plaintiffs had shown a "reasonable probability of success" on the merits of their complaint. To do this, the court used the U.S. Supreme Court's precedent on

medical issues: *Estelle, v. Gamble* (1976)—and the recent *Abu-Jamal* decision of January 2017! Because of that medical precedent, the lives of thousands of men and women in Missouri prisons just got better, and their lives were extended and perhaps saved.

We have little doubt that the medical and corporate interests denying medical treatment here and there will continue to drag their feet and deny, deny, deny relief, but a dam has burst, and the dike has sprung, and HCV is under serious attack.

The HCV prison wars have begun—and we are winning!

—Prison Radio, July 11, 2017

**FREE MUMIA
ABU-JAMAL**

Black Lives Matter and Police Violence

TASASHA HENDERSON INTERVIEW WITH MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

In a righteously angry yet calmly principled collection of commentaries and essays, an acclaimed incarcerated author and intellectual asks: Have Black Lives Ever Mattered? “Mumia Abu-Jamal’s painstaking courage, truth-telling and disinterest in avoiding the reality of American racial life is, as always, honorable,” says Alice Walker.

In his new book Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?, author and activist Mumia Abu-Jamal explores this question over 75 essays, spanning from the late 1990s to 2017. Each essay explores the violence of policing and the criminal legal system, whether from a historical perspective or through the stories of people who have died by the hands of police. In the first essay, “Hate Crimes,” Abu-Jamal questions the legitimacy of the idea of hate crimes, pointing out that police are never charged with a hate crime when they brutalize and kill Black and Brown people. Abu-Jamal’s essays discuss the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, the killing of Tamir Rice by Cleveland, Ohio, police officer Timothy Loehmann, and what the aftermath of these slayings reveals about how the United States views Black people. His conclusion is perfectly summed up in the first two lines of his October 2015 essay titled, “Tamir Rice of Cleveland”—“Question: When is a child not a child? Answer: When it’s a Black child.”

Abu-Jamal spoke with Truthout about some of the issues he engages with in Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?, including police violence and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

Tasasha Henderson: You talk about several cases of police violence that did not make national and international news: Carl Hardiman in Chicago, Shep McDaniel in New York City. And in your essays written in the early part of 2014, you convey a feeling that you had

a sense that something big was coming—that there would be an incident of police violence that would set off a powder keg. Did you have a sense or a feeling that there would be an incident, like what eventually did happen to Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, that would lead to the beginnings of a mass resistance?

We must understand that the state is a hate crime against the poor, the oppressed, Black folks, and Latinas, etc.

Mumia Abu-Jamal: I did have an inkling; say, a feeling. I’ve seen this before, when the frequency and intensity of attacks on Black life was so naked, so ugly, so offensive, that resistance became imperative. Our people have an almost ungodly patience; but when the flames ignite, it can be a formidable social force. Indeed, that is the essence of Black history in the American settler-state. I think Mike Brown’s community was one such instance. And when I saw five young brothers tell a reporter: “My name is Mike Brown,” “My name is Mike Brown,” it was a historic echo from the “Spartacus” era, when slaves of Rome rose and rebelled against the Empire, and identified with each other.

Tasasha Henderson: In your essay “Hate Crimes,” you question what types of violence are considered hate crimes, and the fact that police violence against Black and Brown people is never considered a hate crime. With the introduction and/or passage of Blue Lives Matter laws across the country, making the assault or killing of police a

“hate crime,” how do you view legislative attempts to reduce police violence through such policies as body cameras or increased training of police officers? As we see with hate crime statutes, what was supposed to protect vulnerable people has been turned against us.

Mumia Abu-Jamal: As the Black Movement, now exemplified by Black Lives Matter, has taken a hashtag and exploded beyond its banks, so too must the people seize the slogans tossed out by their class enemies, and lob it back, as in “Blue Lives Are the Only Lives That Matter!,” dig? For words are weapons, and when the state, the empire tries to bullshit people with their white supremacist stuff...turn it around. Utilize the truth to open eyes and minds about the intrinsic nature of the state.

For example, we know, for sure, that cops croak hundreds of people every year, often with impunity. Why not ask, “How many cops are on death row?” If not, why not? My purpose here is hardly to endorse the obscenity of death row, but [if] all lives are equal, and the site of a courtroom is the place where people are treated fairly and equitably, well, why not? Or is death row only for “other” people? Dig?

My point is that the state will always utilize its “law” as a tool of repression—that’s the essential nature of the state; but movements must create and expand the space to raise contradictions. Body cameras? Training? BS. Nonsense. Done. It is a bourgeois mirage. In 1978, when [three] cops beat Delbert Africa senseless, breaking his jaw, it was recorded on video. When it came to trial, the trial judge, Stanley Kubacki, dismissed the all-white jury, and threw out the charges, saying the (armed) cops had reason to fear (unarmed) Delbert, because he was so muscular!

We must understand that the state is a hate crime against the poor, the oppressed, Black folks, and Latinas, etc.

Tasasha Henderson: In your essay, “Where is the Outrage?” you write, “the unity of the people is the greatest weapon against the silence, fear, and oppression imposed by the system. Our unity—as communities, networks, and movements—is so important. Therefore, our unity is attacked.” We are seeing different communities and organizations unify, whether it is the Black Lives Matter network, Fight for \$15, immigrant rights, etc. How can coalitions sustain themselves and how can communities remain unified in the midst of state repression?

History, because it is rich in examples of people’s love of freedom, is a powerful source for the present and the future!

Mumia Abu-Jamal: Movements emerge out of necessity, out of the felt sense that they no longer have anything to lose; out of certainty that the state has failed them yesterday, is failing them today, and will fail them tomorrow (to paraphrase MOVE’s John Africa). The state isn’t the solution, it’s the problem. It is this sense, shared by increasingly large parts of the population, that fuels movements, and builds rebellious, and then revolutionary consciousness. As capitalism—and its concomitant rise of the crony-capitalist-gangster-state—fails, people begin to see commonalities across our false border, and begin to march toward each other, and not against each other.

Remember, capitalism needs racism, and utilizes it to create false consciousness in millions of white poor

and working people who live in the illusion that they have something in common with Trumpites. Unity can’t be presumed, or wished to come into being. When people work together and fight together, they build the practice of unity.

Tasasha Henderson: In your essay, “We Must Fight for More,” you write, “history lives to give us options for the future.” What options do you think history has given for the Black Lives Matter movement? What does history have to teach movement leaders and participants today?

Mumia Abu-Jamal: Malcolm X used to say, “Of all our studies, history best rewards our research.” He learned this from Elijah Muhammad, his teacher. Malcolm repeated this lesson because he knew, in his own life experience, how history transformed him from a prisoner (known and despised as “Satan”) to becoming one of the most respected ministers of the nation, and one of Black America’s most beloved leaders. History offers an endless font of human experience that people, communities and movements can draw from to move forward into the future. History, because it is rich in examples of people’s love of freedom, is a powerful source for the present and the future!

Why do you think the white supremacist governments in the West (like New Mexico, etc.) fought so hard to outlaw Chicano history? Why do you think today’s public schools skimp so much on Black history? They know that Black history is explosive! And history ain’t about what happened years ago, or yesterday. It explains why today is the way it is; and gives ideas about how to transform tomorrows.

Tasasha Henderson: *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?* includes essays from the 1990s up until this year, and spans many aspects of how Black people are victimized by state violence,

including police brutality and incarceration. How do you see your book contributing to the continuing conversation and activism concerning racial justice, anti-police brutality and criminal legal system reform?

Mumia Abu-Jamal: I’m glad *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?* addresses today’s issue of police terrorism, but it must be seen in a longer, deeper, broader continuum. America’s police don’t descend from Scotland Yard in England. They had their birth in the infamous “paddy rollers” of the South, where whites were militarized to oppose any Black slave revolt. Those habits live at the core of any true discussion about what bedevils the lives of Black people today. That should show you some sense of the importance of history just recently noted. Unless we truly grasp those truths, then generations unborn will be struggling with these same problems, and wondering how to change it. Dr. Huey P. Newton, in a late edition of the *Black Panther* newspaper, called for deep transformation of police, to bring forth Citizen Peace Forces, designed to solve problems, not bomb them. It’s time for his ideas to be taken seriously, to begin to utilize history to create openings for better tomorrows.

history ain’t about what happened years ago, or yesterday. It explains why today is the way it is; and gives ideas about how to transform tomorrows.

Tasasha Henderson: As we continue in the uncertain future of a Donald Trump presidency, what guidance do you have for young people who are involved in the Black Lives Matter move-

ment and other movements, as they continue to resist, build and organize?

Mumia Abu-Jamal: Look, we can look at Trump as the Great Boogeyman, or we can soberly examine the roles of Clinton and Obama, where the former perfected the machinery of mass incarceration, and the latter tinkered with it, just as he all but ignored the greatest loss of Black wealth (*i.e.*, criminal mortgage thefts of Black homes) since Reconstruction. We must develop a deeper, refined analysis that gives us all a clear vision of the inherent repression of the state against Black life, a historical continuum that shows no sign of abatement. Or we can play “Republicans bad/Democrats good” like children looking for shadow plays.

The system is bad; we need deep reconstruction to make new ways of living, growing and becoming possible.

—*Truthout*, July 16, 2017

<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/41279-exclusive-interview-mumia-abu-jamal-speaks-about-black-lives-matter-and-police-violence>

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When people work
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The Bell Tolls

Or Should, for Ana Belén Montes

BY SUSAN BABBITT

At the World Social Forum at Puerto Alegre, Brazil, the late Nobel Prize Winner, José Saramago told the following story:

“In a village near Florence, Italy, in 800 A.D., church bells were rung whenever someone died. One day the bells rang and everyone returned from the fields. They looked to see who had died, but all were present. They asked the bell-ringer, ‘Who has died?’ He said: ‘Justice has died.’”¹

What is expected of democracy and the Universal Declaration of Rights, Saramago pointed out, is “flowery, empty legalistic rhetoric” falling far short of the “rational, sensitive dignity we once assumed to be the supreme aspiration of humankind.” Just as in ancient times, the village church bell marked death; the bell must toll, loudly and persistently, the death of justice.

“Justice” that takes no issue with the single “economic power...managed by multinational corporations in line with strategies of domination that have nothing to do with the common good to which, by definition, democracy aspires” is not justice. It cannot be. It doesn’t apply to people, or to most.

It can’t recognize them. Saramago’s bell is metaphorical: It is well-known to philosophers and psychologists that we don’t learn when we think we already know. If you tell me why I shouldn’t step off the roof, I don’t listen. I don’t need to. To learn, I need to know that I don’t know—I need questions.

Knowledge isn’t power: If we can’t imagine what it explains, or might, or we don’t care, it’s useless.

Here’s another point about reason: We think according to expectations, arising from practices, that is, from how we live. Saramago refers to “some

sort of verbal and mental automatism” arising from liberal institutions, that is, from liberal practices, including ways of thinking. It means we don’t see certain “raw, naked facts.” We don’t expect them and therefore don’t see them, no matter the evidence.

Ana Belén Montes saw the facts.² She cared. To see what we don’t expect, we have to care. We have to imagine what might be explained by those facts.

She’s been imprisoned since 2001. If she were in China, Russia or Venezuela, we’d know her. Sixty years old, with cancer, she’s in a Texas prison for women with psychiatric disorders (although she suffers no such disorder,) prohibited from visitors (except a few family members,) phone calls, letters, and news.

Her crime is that she opposed, and still opposes, her government’s foreign policy.

Employed by the Defense Intelligence Agency, she knew facts, now declassified, about U.S. aggression toward Cuba. She had the courage to believe them. She gave them to the Cuban government. She gained nothing. She hurt no one, stole nothing and committed no violence—except to lies.

She believed in justice, the “rational, sensitive dignity” kind. She thought Cuba should not be forced, through assassination, biological warfare, intimidation and destabilization, to submit to U.S. interests.

In Havana recently, a taxi driver told me, “I have one question: Why are they so afraid of a small, poor country? What do they think will happen if they just let us develop?”

A lot will happen. It has to do, again, with how understanding occurs. We think within social limits. We see

and give importance only to the facts that matter, given our interests. But sometimes we encounter an example that makes us care in ways we did not previously. We may even be moved, emotionally. Then we consider evidence we would not/could not have considered otherwise. It was there all along.

A Cuban friend working in tourism said that since U.S. citizens began arriving in Cuba in greater numbers, she has not met a single one who was not positively surprised. “It is not what I expected,” they say.

If only they would seek out the explanations. But this takes imagination, caring, and courage.

Eduardo Galeano tells the following story in *El Libro de los Abrazos*: A friend was taking his small boy to see the sea for the first time. As they approached, the sea was just an intense smell. When finally it was in front of them, in its immensity, the boy was quiet, speechless before unexpected beauty. Eventually, able to speak, he said simply, “Papá, help me to see.”

We are lied to about democracy. This is well-known. But we are also lied to about lies. The truth is that we don’t see facts just by looking. We don’t even see what is in front of us just by looking. We need help to see what is not expected.

Galeano says art helps us to see. It can help us to see what we don’t see. It raises questions. People can do that for us too. Ana Belén Montes is one. She has believed, and still believes, truths that are available. She has possessed, and



evidently still possesses, the moral imagination to know such truths matter.

After 16 years in isolation, she said, “I live totally isolated. I am subject to extreme psychological pressure...but I will resist until the end.”

She went on: “I say to you what I’ve said to Cubans and to those sharing my solidarity with Cuba, that what matters is that the Cuban revolution exists... that there will always be the Cuban revolution. Cubans must care for their revolution. I tried to do that.”

Cuba is an example. But to see what it is an example of—dignity, humanity—we may need help. Ana Belén Montes should be known, and released, for the sake of justice. But she should also be known in a time of lies,

even about lies, for the sake of truth. As Galeano suggests, we need help even to see beauty, if unimagined. So much more so for justice, unimagined and urgent.

Please sign petition here:

<https://www.change.org/p/1000-women-say-free-ana-belen-montes>

For more information, write to the Canadian Network on Cuba (cnc@canadiannetworkoncuba.ca) or in Cuba, Cuba X Ana Belén Montes (cincoheroes@listas.cujae.edu.cu).

Write to:

Ana Belén Montes #25037-016
Carswell Fed. Medical Center
P.O. Box 27317
Ft. Worth, TX 76127



1 Saramago, José, (2002, March 9), “From justice to democracy by way of the bells (Speech at the World Social Forum. Puerto Alegre, Brazil).

2 E.g. <http://www.prolibertad.org/ana-belen-montes>

I Am Not Your Negro

A MOVIE REVIEW BY ERNIE TATE

Now and then, and despite its capitalist and racial biases, our culture produces something that can speak quite eloquently and uniquely about the times we're living through. In this case, I'm referring to an amazing documentary film that has been released recently, *I Am Not Your Negro*, by Raoul Peck, an acclaimed Haitian director with major films to his credit. This latest work is well worth seeing and has been well received here.

A meticulously woven story of the civil rights movement at a critical juncture in its history, expressed in the marvelous words of James Baldwin, the documentary focuses on the lives of three central leaders of that movement in the 1960s, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, their lives tragically cut short by assassinations, killings that strategically weakened the movement and from which it never recovered.

From a poor and large working class family, Baldwin had emerged on the U.S. scene from the slums of Harlem to become a major writer of his time, even internationally. In the forties he exiled himself to Paris to escape the deep homophobia of America, becoming a brilliant novelist and playwright, returning to New York in 1957, an extremely articulate propagandist and theorizer of the then rising civil rights movement and powerful voice for Black Americans.

The three central leaders of that struggle, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Baldwin had personally known and considered them friends. All were assassinated within five years of each other in the 1960s.

"...(A)ll three were deemed dangerous and therefore disposable," Raoul

Peck, the director says, because "they were eliminating the haze of racial confusion," in a short book of the same name that was released at the time of the film.

The clever conceit of Peck's documentary is that it's based on an incomplete manuscript, thirty pages of notes of a book Baldwin had begun shortly before his untimely death in 1987. The director says that Baldwin "was determined to expose the complex links and similarities among Medgar, Malcolm and Martin. He was going to write his ultimate book, 'I Remember This House,'" a revolutionary account of their lives.

Peck's documentary is a brilliant imagining of that unfinished work. In preparing the script, the director relied heavily on Baldwin's notes that Gloria, a younger sister of Baldwin, generously turned over to him. They are the skeleton for the narrative.

Through a very clever and subtle weaving together of archival footage, interviews, stereotypic images from racist advertising from the thirties and forties, and from contemporary TV, we are provided with a historical context and an incredible graphic depiction of the momentous civil rights movement that swept the American south in those years, the lunch counter sit-ins, the courageous fight to integrate the educational system, the voter registration drives, an important part of the history often forgotten.

I admired the film especially for the objective way it treats Malcolm X, who believed Black people should unite independently under their own leadership and as a nation to confront the white power structure. Malcolm's role

in history is often distorted, especially in popular accounts in the media, which frequently characterize him as a "Black racist." Here in Peck's documentary we experience him as a legitimate part of the movement and speaking in his own voice as a revolutionary.

Seeing on the screen the images of violence of the white mobs and the brutality of the police, reminds us, should we need reminding, that nothing much has changed for Black people in America since the murders of these three Black leaders. Peck, the director, is telling us something very important here: racism still runs deep in American society.

It's true that Black people are no longer being lynched—and there are shocking images of that from the past in the film—but the lack of improvement in American society for Blacks over time, is an idea central to the documentary, which is re-enforced throughout with horrific images from today's headlines, of the gunning down of many unarmed Black people by the police, commonly captured on video by bystanders, witnesses to those events.

The main voice we hear throughout the film articulating this thesis is James Baldwin's, but the film is also cleverly narrated by Samuel L. Jackson, one of Hollywood's leading Black actors, who gives voice to Baldwin's words so skillfully it's as though it's him we are hearing.

Having become a major public intellectual, the James Baldwin we see in the film was very much in demand for appearances on talk shows and debates about the relationship between Blacks and whites in America. He's beautiful to listen to. We see him entirely at ease patiently putting forward his ideas, restrained and in a

beautiful cadence, almost prose and without notes. It's worth seeing the documentary for that alone.

Seeing and hearing him speak at the Students Union in Cambridge, Britain is a high point. His mastery of his ideas on full display, at the conclusion of his talk he wins a rousing and standing ovation from the students, much to his surprise, if the bemused look on his face is anything to go by. It's also a reminder that in those years in Britain students were becoming quickly radicalized and responsive to what he had to say. Malcolm X spoke at Oxford around that time and received a similar reception.

But the documentary is not just about a piece of history, it's very much about today, and should be an inspiration to many of today's Black activists, coming as it does just after the election of Trump, an essential feature of whose campaign was a naked appeal to racism and the encouragement of white identity politics, at a time of increasing violence against Blacks in America. For that Raoul Peck should be thanked. I'm sure the film will also have a positive impact in Canada, where the "Black Lives Matter" movement has been on the streets leading a long and determined struggle against the Toronto police department's policies of racial profiling "carding" practices, of which the overwhelming target has been Black people. It will be a boost to the Black movement as a whole, on both sides of the border.

I urge you to go and see it, even for a second time, if possible. It has many lessons to teach us.

—*The North Star*, April 8, 2017

<http://www.thenorthstar.info/?p=13241>

1917

A change in the soul as much as in the factory

BOOK REVIEW BY PAUL LE BLANC

Neil Faulkner, *A People's History of the Russian Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 2017, 272 pages, including index.

China Miéville, *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*, London: Verso, 2017, 343 pages.

What sense can we make of the Russian Revolution? This remains a live question a century after it occurred. "We know well the consequences that these great upheavals can bring," Russian leader Vladimir Putin explained on the eve of 2017. "Unfortunately, our country went through many such upheavals and their consequences in the 20th century." As historian Nikita Sokolov tartly notes: "The authorities cannot celebrate 1917. Whatever might have happened, the impulse of the revolution was social justice. A country with such inequality can't celebrate this" (Neil MacFarquhar, "Revolution? What Revolution?" *Russia Asks A Hundred Years Later*, *New York Times*, March 10, 2017).

Writing from Moscow, a newly-made friend told me that the revolutionary period of Russian history "is always something I want to know more about—it is particularly very complicated and unclear. I believe that analyzing all the events from a distance (I mean it literally) may help us understand them better." We are fortunate that there appeared early in this anniversary year reliable and very readable introductions, written "from a distance" (Britain), that can help all of us understand what really happened: Neil Faulkner's *A People's History of the Russian Revolution* and China Miéville's *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*.

Faulkner is a professional historian (and an archeologist to boot,) Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, who has written on such diverse topics as

the Roman Empire, Lawrence of Arabia, and *A Marxist History of the World: From Neanderthals to Neoliberals*. The approach and style animating his new popularization of the 1917 upheaval is best conveyed by letting Faulkner speak for himself:

"Right-wing historians often describe October as a Bolshevik 'coup' made possible by the 'anarchy' into which Russia had fallen by autumn 1917. The misunderstanding is profound. Their basic error is to view history from above, not below. What looks to them like 'anarchy' was, in fact, the leaching away of state authority and the rise of new organs of popular power. What they describe as a 'coup' was, in fact, an expression of the democratic will of millions of workers, soldiers, sailors, and peasants. The Tsarist monarchy had commanded an army of millions. Yet it was overthrown in the February Revolution. The Provisional Government had inherited that army of million. Yet it was swept away by the October Insurrection. Historical events of this magnitude are not brought about by mere 'coups.' The very success of the October Insurrection hides its true character. The revolution is so ripe—the social crisis so deep, the authority of the government so hollowed out, the masses so willing to support decisive action—that, in the event, a few tens-of-thousands were sufficient to execute the popular will."

The admirable clarity of this passage is characteristic of the entire volume, with the panorama of Russia's revolutionary history succinctly and neatly laid out in 250 pages. Four chapters in Part One (entitled "The Spark") survey developments from 1825 to 1916, describing the Tsarist regime, the revolutionary tradition, Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and the First World War.

Part Two (entitled “The Tempest”) has four more chapters on 1917, with the February revolution overthrowing the Tsar, followed by “dual power” between the people’s democratic councils (soviets) and the Provisional Government dominated by old-time politicians, then an unsuccessful attempt to squelch the revolution, which contributes mightily to the Bolshevik-led insurrection in October. Part Three (entitled “The Darkness”) tells us what happened from 1918 to 1938, with three chapters describing, in turn, the failure of the world revolution that doomed hopes for the triumph of socialism in backward Russia, the authoritarian and bureaucratic consequences of, or Soviet Russia’s isolation in, a hostile capitalist world, and from this the rise of the horrific Stalinist form that modernization took (which Faulkner terms “state-capitalism.”) In a brief epilogue, he aptly concludes: “The Russian Revolution of 1917 is rich in lessons for today’s crisis-ridden world of exploitation, oppression, and violence. The Bolsheviks have much to teach us.”

Readers familiar with Leon Trotsky’s magisterial *History of the Russian Revolution* and Tony Cliff’s three-volume study of Lenin will see that Faulkner’s interpretation of events closely follows theirs. He adds his own touches, however. What might appear to be a few casual sentences in a preliminary note beautifully illuminate a central cause of the revolution: “A loaf of bread cost about 40 kopeks in 1914, but more than three times as much in 1917. Wartime inflation averaged about 500 percent across the full range of consumer necessities. Wages increased barely half this rate. ... It is safe to assume that living standards, already pitifully low, plummeted during the war.”

There are other touches, however, about which one might raise questions. For example, based on some of his own negative experiences in recent developments on the British left, Faulkner

emphasizes more than once that Lenin’s organization was superior to what he and others experienced: “Lenin’s Bolshevik Party was never a ‘democratic-centralist’ sect,” adding that “a ‘democratic-centralist’ organization is one where power is concentrated in the hands of a (largely) self-perpetuating leadership, or even in the hands of a single cult-like guru.” Faulkner certainly shows that Lenin’s Bolsheviks functioned democratically, but the sweeping dismissal of the term democratic centralism is not historically sound. The meaning of “democratic centralism” has been distorted and abused by what Tariq Ali once termed “toy Bolshevik parties” over the years (not to mention more substantial Stalinist organizations.) Yet in the Russian revolutionary movement and elsewhere the term had a more honorable and useful connotation. Adhered to by Mensheviks (who first employed the term) as well as Bolsheviks in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, it meant full freedom of discussion, and (once a decision was made) unity in action—suggesting a seriously democratic and coherent revolutionary collective of activists. This, as Faulkner shows us, the Bolsheviks certainly were.

But this leads to another quibble one might have with Faulkner’s account. In his account, it seems to be implied that only the Bolsheviks were “the revolutionaries” in the period leading up to the Revolution. Referring to the 1903 split among Russian Social Democrats, he tells us that “a line was drawn at the Second Congress between reformists, henceforward known as ‘Mensheviks’ (meaning ‘supporters of the minority’) and revolutionaries, henceforward known as ‘Bolsheviks’ (meaning ‘supporters of the majority.’)” In fact, a majority of the Mensheviks were in agreement with Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin himself in their rejection of the “reformism” in the socialist movement represented by such revisionists as

Eduard Bernstein, also favoring (and working for) the revolutionary overthrow of the Tsarist order as much as the Bolsheviks did—indeed, in 1917 some actually joined the Bolsheviks. Of course, it can be argued (consistent with the thrust of Faulkner’s account) that the Bolsheviks represented, as things turned out, the most consistent and effective revolutionary force in the Russian socialist movement.

While there are similarities in the narratives that Faulkner and China Miéville present, there are also differences. Miéville is best known as a best-selling author of science fiction novels (he has sometimes referred to them as “weird fiction,”) and his account is—perhaps predictably, for those who know his work) “messier.” This hardly means it is less accomplished. It is a beautifully constructed and flowing account of how masses of ordinary and extraordinary people—workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, revolutionary activists and more—confronted and overturned oppressive power structures in Russia’s October Revolution of 1917. Knowledgeable readers will perceive Miéville’s skillful engagement with all the right sources, presenting an incredibly rich interpretation of what happened.

An initial chapter sweeps through the pre-history of 1917, from the days of Peter the Great down to the horrors of the Great War that exploded in 1914. Then—month-by-month—one bustling chapter after another brings us from the February overthrow of the Tsar to revolutionary climax of “Red October,” with a succinct yet eloquent epilogue, which reflects on what became of it all.

Near the start of the book is this priceless portrait of the Tsar:

“As a youth, Nicholas II submitted stoically to his father’s bullying. As tsar he is distinguished by courtesy, dedication to duty, and little else. ‘His face,’ one official hesitantly reports, ‘is expressionless.’ Absence

defines him: absence of expression, imagination, intelligence, insight, drive, determination, élan. Description after bemused description turns on the ‘otherworldliness’ of a man adrift in history. He is a well-educated vacuity stuffed with the prejudices of his milieu—including progromist anti-Semitism, aimed particularly at revolutionary zhidy, ‘yids.’ Averse to change of any kind at all, he is wholeheartedly wedded to autocracy. Uttering the word ‘intelligentsia,’ he makes the same disgusted face as when he says ‘syphilis.’”

Throughout we are treated to an imaginative retelling of the story, graced by humor and humanizing characterizations, wonderful touches of color and animation, richly informative, down-to-earth, full of tension and life and drama—a page-turner even for those who know how it all turns out.

The Bolsheviks are by no means the only revolutionaries here—anarchists, Left-Socialist Revolutionaries, Menshevik-Internationalists, and non-party activists (some newly-minted militants) are part of the story—but there is no doubt that the Bolsheviks have the most effective organization, and some of them are in a position to employ outstanding skills and ideas that make a difference. Lenin is by no means always right—but he often gets it right, and he also gets some terrific lines, such as: “One must always try to be as radical as reality itself.”

There are innumerable deft touches that, for example, pepper the description of the meeting of the Bolshevik core leadership deciding on the October insurrection. As the left-Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov leaves his spacious home in the morning to go to the Soviet, his wife, Galina Flakserman, a longtime Bolshevik activist, “eyed the nasty skies and made him promise not to try to return that night, but to stay at his office, as was his custom when the weather was so bad.” As he bedded down in his office that night, the

Bolshevik Central Committee—Kollontai, Trotsky, Uritsky, Stalin, Iaokovleva, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and finally Lenin wearing a disguise—gather in his home to debate and make their fateful decision.

The meaning of “democratic centralism” has been distorted and abused by what Tariq Ali once termed “toy Bolshevik parties” over the years (not to mention more substantial Stalinist organizations.) Yet in the Russian revolutionary movement and elsewhere the term had a more honorable and useful connotation. Adhered to by Mensheviks (who first employed the term) as well as Bolsheviks in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, it meant full freedom of discussion, and (once a decision was made) unity in action—suggesting a seriously democratic and coherent revolutionary collective of activists.

“Lenin held forth. He was impassioned. As the hours wore on he drove home his now-familiar points. The time had come, he insisted again, for insurrection. The party’s

‘indifference toward the question of an uprising’ was a dereliction.

“It was not a monologue. Everyone took their turn to speak.

“Late at night, a knock at the door sent hearts lurching, plunging them all into fear. But it was only Flakserman’s brother, Yuri. Another Bolshevik, privy to the meeting, he had come to help with the samovar. He busied himself with the huge communal kettle, making tea.”

Kamenev and Zinoviev then return to their arguments on why Lenin is wrong. “They evoked the weight of the petty bourgeoisie who were not—not yet, perhaps—on their side. They suggested Lenin overestimated the Bolsheviks’ power in Petrograd, let alone elsewhere. They were adamant that he was incorrect about the imminence of international revolution.” They argue for patience, and “their comrades called the consistently circumspect pair the ‘Heavenly Twins,’ sometimes affectionately, sometimes in exasperation.” When the debate ended and the decision was finally made—to move forward with the insurrection—“the tension eased. Iurii Flakserman brought cheese, sausage and bread, and the famished revolutionaries fell to. Good-naturedly they teased the Heavenly Twins: hesitating to overthrow the bourgeoisie was so very Kamenev.”

The “messiness” of Miéville’s account reflects the actual messiness of the historical realities, and of life itself. In discussing the taking of the Winter Palace, near the end of the story, Miéville comments that “the revolutionaries made slapstick errors,” that after one delay following another Lenin was in a rage, according to one Bolshevik activist, “like a lion in a cage. ... He was ready to shoot us.” When the Battleship Aurora finally fires the signal for the Bolshevik assault, “a cataclysmic boom shook Petrograd” and “scores of the last defenders in the palace lost heart and abandoned their

posts, leaving only a hard core too committed, brave, paralyzed, exhausted, stupid, or afraid to flee.”

While there is sometimes slapstick, there is also grandeur as the masses of workers, soldiers, sailors and peasants surge forward to take power into their own hands, through their democratic councils, to create a new and better world. “It is not for nostalgia’s sake that the strange story of the first socialist revolution in history deserves celebration,” Miéville insists. “The standard of October declares that things once changed, an they might do so again.” His elaboration is worth considering:

“October, for an instant, brings a new kind of power. Fleeting, there is a shift towards workers’ control of production and the rights of peasants to the land. Equal rights for men and women in work and in marriage, the right to divorce, maternity support. The decriminalization of homosexuality, 100 years ago. Moves towards national self-determination. Free and universal education, the expansion of literacy. And with literacy comes cultural explosion, a thirst to learn, the mushrooming of universities and lecture series and adult schools. A change in the soul, as Lunacharsky might put it, as much as in the factory. ...”

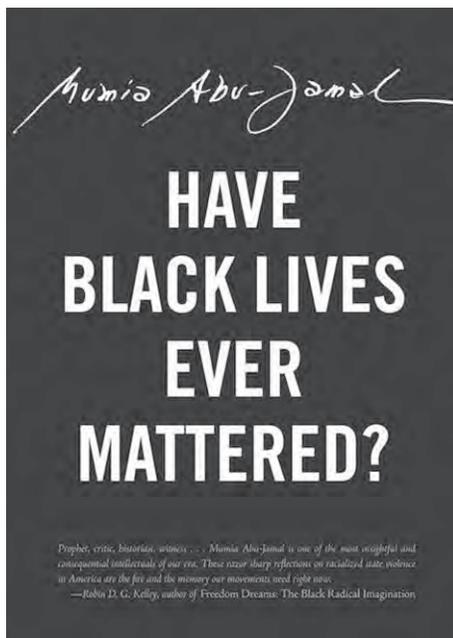
As an outstanding piece of literature, China Miéville’s *October* belongs on the same shelf as John Reed’s eyewitness classic *Ten Days That Shook the World*, but even more it belongs in the hands of activists who will be shaking the world in the twenty-first century.

—International Socialist Review, Summer 2017

<http://isreview.org/issue/105/1917-change-soul-much-factory>

Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?

A BOOK REVIEW BY ROBERT FANTINA



Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?
(City Lights Open Media)

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

With the recent acquittal of two more police officers in the deaths of unarmed Black men, the question posed by the title of this book is as relevant as it ever was. Through a series of concise, clear essays, Mumia Abu-Jamal details the racism against Blacks, comparing today’s behaviors with the lynchings that were common in the south prior to the decade of the sixties. He points out the obvious: The passage of Civil Rights legislation hasn’t changed much; it simply changed the way racism operates.

The ways in which the white establishment has worked to oppress Blacks is astounding. After the Civil War, when slavery was no longer legal, “whites realized that the combination of trumped-up legal charges and forced labor as punishment created both a desirable business proposition and an incredibly effective tool for intimidating rank-and-file emancipated African

Americans and doing away with their most effective leaders.”

Abu-Jamal states that, today, “where once whites killed and terrorized from beneath a KKK hood, now they now did so openly from behind a little badge.” He details the killing of Black men and women in the U.S. with almost complete impunity.

There are two related issues Abu-Jamal discusses. The first is the rampant racism that enables the police to kill unarmed Blacks, as young as 12 years old, for no reason, and the second is the “justice” system that allows them to get away with it.

One shocking crime, amid countless others, occurred in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2012; a police officer was acquitted in the deaths of two, unarmed Blacks, after leaping onto the hood of their car and firing 15 rounds from his semi-automatic rifle into the car’s occupants. That is 137 shots, at point blank range, into the bodies of two unarmed people.

If this were an anomaly, it would be barbaric, but it is not: it is common practice for the police to kill unarmed Blacks, and, on the rare occasions that they are charged with a crime, for the judges and juries to acquit them.

In the U.S., Black citizens are disproportionately imprisoned. With for-profit prisons on the rise, this injustice will only increase.

Abu-Jamal relates story after story with the same plot, and only the names are different. An unarmed Black man is stopped by the police for any of a variety of reasons ranging from trivial (broken tail light), to more significant (suspect in a robbery). But too often, the outcome is the same: the Black man is dead and the police officer who killed him, more often than not white,

is either not charged, or acquitted after being charged.

The Black Lives Matter movement formed to combat this blatant injustice, but it will be an uphill battle. As Abu-Jamal says, “Police serve the ownership and wealth classes of their societies, not the middling or impoverished people. For the latter, it is quite the reverse.” As a result, people of color suffer disproportionately, too often winding up on the wrong side of a gun.

What is to be done? Abu-Jamal refers to the writings of Dr. Huey P. Newton, who calls not for community policing, but for community control of the police. Abu-Jamal argues forcefully for a new movement, “driven by commitment, ethics, intelligence, solidarity, and passions; for without passion, the embers may dim and die.”

Have Black Lives Ever Mattered? is powerful, disturbing, well-written, and an important book for our day.

Robert Fantina is the author of Empire, Racism and Genocide: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy. His articles on foreign policy, most frequently concerning Israel and Palestine, have appeared in Counterpunch and WarIsaCrime.org.

—*New York Journal of Books*, July 2017

<http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/Black-lives>

Secret Story of the War on Drugs

The *History Channel* is finally telling the stunning secret story of the war on drugs

BY JON SCHWARZ

June 18, 2017—The good news for Grassley, and for everyone else, is that starting Sunday night and running through Wednesday the *History Channel* is showing a new four-part series called “America’s War on Drugs.” Not only is it an important contribution to recent American history, it’s also the first time U.S. television has ever told the core truth about one of the most important issues of the past 50 years.

That core truth is: The war on drugs has always been a pointless sham. For decades the federal government has engaged in a shifting series of alliances of convenience with some of the world’s largest drug cartels. So while the U.S. incarceration rate has quintupled since President Richard Nixon first declared the war on drugs in 1971, top narcotics dealers have simultaneously enjoyed protection at the highest levels of power in America.

On the one hand, this shouldn’t be surprising. The voluminous documentation of this fact in dozens of books has long been available to anyone with curiosity and a library card.

Yet somehow, despite the fact the U.S. has no formal system of censorship, this monumental scandal has never before been presented in a comprehensive way in the medium where most Americans get their information: TV.

That’s why “America’s War on Drugs” is a genuine milestone. We’ve recently seen how ideas that once seemed absolutely preposterous and taboo—for instance, that the Catholic Church was consciously safeguarding priests who sexually abused children, or that Bill Cosby may not have been the best choice for America’s Dad—can after years of silence finally break

through into popular consciousness and exact real consequences. The series could be a watershed in doing the same for the reality behind one of the most cynical and cruel policies in U.S. history.

The series, executive produced by Julian P. Hobbs, Elli Hakami, and Anthony Lappé, is a standard TV documentary; there’s the amalgam of interviews, file footage, and dramatic recreations. What’s not standard is the story told on camera by former Drug Enforcement Administration operatives as well as journalists and drug dealers themselves. (One of the reporters is Ryan Grim, *The Intercept’s* Washington bureau chief and author of *This Is Your Country on Drugs: The Secret History of Getting High in America*.)

There’s no mealy mouthed truckling about what happened. The first episode opens with the voice of Lindsay Moran, a one-time clandestine CIA officer, declaring, “The agency was elbow deep with drug traffickers.”

Then Richard Stratton, a marijuana smuggler turned writer and television producer, explains, “Most Americans would be utterly shocked if they knew the depth of involvement that the Central Intelligence Agency has had in the international drug trade.”

Next, New York University professor Christian Parenti tells viewers, “The CIA is from its very beginning collaborating with mafiosas who are involved in the drug trade because these mafiosas will serve the larger agenda of fighting communism.”

For the next eight hours, the series sprints through history that’s largely the greatest hits of the U.S. government’s partnership with heroin, hallucinogen, and cocaine dealers. That these greatest hits can fill up most of

four two-hour episodes demonstrates how extraordinarily deep and ugly the story is.

First we learn about the CIA working with Florida mob boss Santo Trafficante Jr. in the early 1960s. The CIA wanted Fidel Castro dead and, in return for Trafficante's help in various assassination plots, was willing to turn a blind eye to the extensive drug trafficking by Trafficante and his allied Cuban exiles.

Then there's the extremely odd tale of how the CIA imported significant amounts of LSD from its Swiss manufacturer in hopes that it could be used for successful mind control. Instead, by dosing thousands of young volunteers including Ken Kesey, Whitey Bulger, and Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, the agency accidentally helped popularize acid and generate the 1960s counterculture of psychedelia.

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. allied with anti-communist forces in Laos that leveraged our support to become some of the largest suppliers of opium on earth. Air America, a CIA front, flew supplies for the guerrillas into Laos and then flew drugs out, all with the knowledge and protection of U.S. operatives.

The same dynamic developed in the 1980s as the Reagan administration

tried to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The planes that secretly brought arms to the contras turned around and brought cocaine back to America, again shielded from U.S. law enforcement by the CIA.

“The CIA is from its very beginning collaborating with mafiosas who are involved in the drug trade because these mafiosas will serve the larger agenda of fighting communism.”

Most recently, there's our 16-year-long war in Afghanistan. While less has been uncovered about the CIA's machinations here, it's hard not to notice that we installed Hamid Karzai as president while his brother apparently was on the CIA payroll and, simultaneously, one of the country's biggest opium dealers. Afghanistan now supplies about 90 percent of the world's heroin.

To its credit, the series makes clear that this is not part of a secret government plot to turn Americans into drug addicts. But, as Moran puts it, “When the CIA is focused on a mission, on a

particular end, they're not going to sit down and pontificate about “What are the long-term, global consequences of our actions going to be?” Winning their secret wars will always be their top priority, and if that requires cooperation with drug cartels that are flooding the U.S. with their product, so be it. “A lot of these patterns that have their origins in the 1960s become cyclical,” Moran adds. “Those relationships develop again and again throughout the war on drugs.”

What makes this history so grotesque is the government's mind-breaking levels of hypocrisy. It's like Donald Trump declaring a War on Real Estate Developers that fills prisons with people who occasionally rent out their spare bedroom on Airbnb.

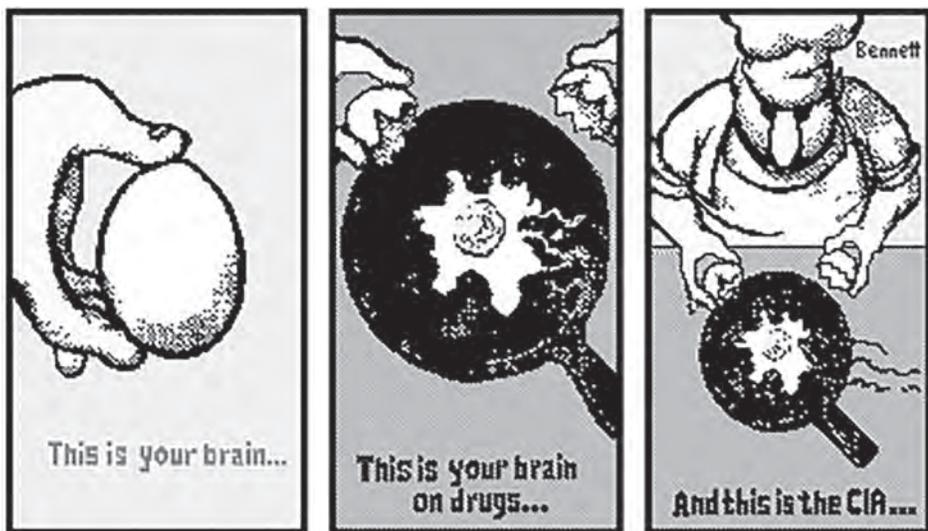
That brings us back to Charles Grassley. Grassley is now chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, a longtime committed drug warrior and—during the 1980s—a supporter of the contras.

Yet even Grassley is showing signs that he realizes there may have been some flaws in the war on drugs since the beginning. He recently has cosponsored a bill that would reduce minimum sentences for drug offenses.

So now that the *History Channel* has granted Grassley his wish and is broadcasting this extraordinarily important history, it's our job to make sure he and everyone like him sits down and watches it. That this series exists at all shows that we're at a tipping point with this brazen, catastrophic lie. We have to push hard enough to knock it over.

—*The Intercept*, June 18 2017

<https://theintercept.com/2017/06/18/the-history-channel-is-finally-telling-the-stunning-secret-story-of-the-war-on-drugs/>



Dismantling Domination

What we can learn about freedom from Karl Marx

AN INTERVIEW WITH C.J. POLYCHRONIOU

Over the years, especially following the latest global financial crisis that erupted in late 2007, there has been a renewed interest in the work of Karl Marx. Indeed, Marx remains essential for understanding capitalism, but his political project continues to produce conflicting interpretations. What really motivated Marx to undertake a massive study of the laws of the capitalist mode of production? Was Marx interested in liberty, or merely in equality? And did Marx's vision of communism have any links to "actually existing socialism" (i.e., the socialist regimes of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc?)

Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital, a recently published book by McGill University Professor William Clare Roberts, offers a rigorous and unique interpretation of Marx's political and philosophical project. The book reveals why Marx remains extremely relevant today to all those seeking to challenge capitalism's domination and violence—from its exploitation of labor power to the use of oppressive stage apparatuses as reflected in the exercise of police brutality. We spoke to William Clare Roberts about Marx's project and vision of communism.

C.J. Polychroniou: In your recently published book *Marx's Inferno*, you contend that liberty, rather than equality, was Marx's primary politico-philosophical concern and, subsequently, claim that his work and discourse belong in the republican tradition of political thought. Can you elaborate a bit on these claims and tell us how they are derived from a particular reading of Marx's work?

William Clare Roberts: I would say it a bit differently. Marx is certainly concerned with equality. Everyone on

the left is. The question is: equality of what? This is where freedom, or liberty, comes in. In my book, I argue that Marx shared the radical republican project of securing universal equal freedom. When we talk about equality on the left today, this is too often assumed to mean equality of material wealth or equality of treatment, such that economic equality is the goal in itself. For Marx, economic inequality was not the main problem. It was a consequence and a breeding ground of domination. This was Marx's prime concern.

To be dominated is to be subject to the whims or caprice of others, to have no control over whether or not they interfere with you, your life, your actions, your body. Republicans, going back to the Roman republic, have recognized that this lack of control over how others treat you is, of itself, inimical to human flourishing. [According to their philosophy], whether or not the powerful actually hurt you is actually less important than the fact that they have the power to hurt you, and you can't control whether or not or how they use that power. It is in this space of uncertainty and fear that power does its work. So, for example, that an employer can fire a worker at will is usually enough to secure the worker's obedience, especially where the worker doesn't have many alternative sources of income. Likewise, that the police have the basically unchecked power to arrest, beat and harass people in many neighborhoods produces all manner of distortions in how people live, regardless of whether they have actually been beaten or harassed. To live free is to live without this fear or this need to watch out for the power-

ful. And this means being equally empowered.

Traditionally, republicans were concerned only to protect the freedom of a certain class of men within their own political community. In the 19th century, however, workers, women, escaped slaves—people who lived with domination—began to take over this republican theory of freedom and to insist that everyone should enjoy equal freedom. I read Marx as part of this tradition.

Marx's major innovation in this tradition was to develop a theory of the capitalist economy as a system of domination. Radicals then—like many radicals today—assimilated capital to previous forms of power—military, feudal, or extortionary. They saw the capitalist simply as a monopolist, and the government as the enforcement squad of the monopolists. To Marx, this was insufficient as a critical diagnosis. The capitalists are, like the workers, dependent upon the market. They must act as they do or be replaced by other, more effective capitalists. Marx saw in this market dependence a new sort of all-round social domination. The livelihood of each depends upon the unpredictable and uncontrollable decisions of many others. This impersonal domination mediates and transforms the other forms of domination people experience.

C.J. Polychroniou: One of the most interesting aspects of your book, at least for me, is the analysis of Marx's use and understanding of exploitation. Clearly, as you point out, Marx was concerned with the exploitation of labor power, not with exploitation as a general social category. What's the

political significance of this, and what's your explanation for the general tendency among contemporary radical analyses on capitalism to shy away from the use of expressions like "surplus value" and "class struggle?"

William Clare Roberts: This is a specific development of the previous point. Because the impersonal domination of the market mediates the other aspects of capitalist production, capitalist exploitation is quite unlike other forms of exploitation. As Marx puts it in *Capital*, capitalists did not invent the exploitation of surplus labor. But, in the past, those who enjoyed the fruits of other people's labor did so by means of extortion, theft and coercion. Exploitation was, therefore, a drain on production; it disincentivized production. Capitalist production, on the other hand, incentivizes labor and production like nothing else ever has. The exploitation of labor-power—Marx's technical phrase for capitalist exploitation—is so effective, in fact, that overwork is endemic to capitalist economies.

Marx thought that workers organizing to fight overwork was one of the most important and powerful levers for the development and transformation of capitalist production. The fight against overwork, and for higher wages, was, he argued, the basic spur that drove capitalists to introduce new production technologies. Industrialization and mechanization, in turn, provoke the agglomeration of capitalist producers, increasing both the mass of workers and the concentration of capital. These fights also bring workers together, and give them political experience. All of this, Marx argued, prepared workers to win the battle someday, and to replace capitalist production entirely.

This understanding of the links between exploitation, class struggle, capitalist development and revolutionary politics has largely fallen out of favor among radicals. I am very inter-

ested in the history of this theory's decline, in part because I think the theory had more going for it than many of its critics—even very sympathetic critics—realize....

But Marx thought that wages made people interdependent on one another and dependent upon technologically advanced production to such an extent that wage workers could only liberate themselves—even at a national level—by liberating everyone, everywhere.

The criticisms of Marx's value theory...have diverted attention from the basic observations that underlie Marx's account of capitalist exploitation. Unlike materials and technologies of production, which provide objectively predictable inputs to the production process, workers must be induced to work, and how much work they provide is a matter requiring constant management and government. Marx's attention to the workplace as a site of governance and induced activity is as relevant as ever.

The other major reason Marx's analysis has fallen out of favor is that the link between class struggle and revolutionary politics seemed to be broken. On the one hand, the industrial working class seemed to be integrated into capitalism by winning the franchise, winning higher wages through unionization, and winning social security in the form of the welfare state. On the other hand, the locus of radicalism and revolt seemed to be

in the students, the peasants of the colonized world, and the oppressed peoples fighting for national liberation.

But none of these developments actually undermine Marx's argument, which was that only those dependent upon wages for life—a class that far exceeds industrial workers—have an interest in universal emancipation. Anyone who is dominated or oppressed has an interest in the emancipation of their own group. But Marx thought that wages made people interdependent on one another and dependent upon technologically advanced production to such an extent that wage workers could only liberate themselves—even at a national level—by liberating everyone, everywhere. At a moment when left populism—be it that of Sanders or Corbyn or Mélançon—seems compelled to reinforce national frontiers, Marx's argument should be revisited.

C.J. Polychroniou: Marx's critique of capitalist economy and society, you argue in your book, was influenced by the poetic imagery of Dante. Is this of political import, or simply of literary significance?

William Clare Roberts: I am wary of too simple a distinction between the literary and the political. Marx rewrote *Dante's Inferno*, I argue, because Dante's moral imaginary was deeply ingrained in the vernacular of the workers' movement. The literary aspects of *Capital*—its structure, its metaphors, its images—are integral to its political mission: to reshape the theoretical and political language of the workers' movement. To us today, it may seem merely literary, but that is because the Christian-Aristotelian moral discourse is no longer part of our vernacular in the way it was in 19th-century Europe.

At the most fundamental level, I think Dante is crucial for Marx's political argument because the *Inferno* provides the basic categories of wrong that

structure Marx's argument in *Capital*. Capitalist society is out of control, violent, fraudulent and treacherous. These are Dante's categories. Marx reconfigures and redefines them, fleshes them out with political economy, and transforms them into a critical social theory. You don't need Dante to understand that critical social theory once it is finished, but seeing the Dante in it helps reveal its genesis and structure.

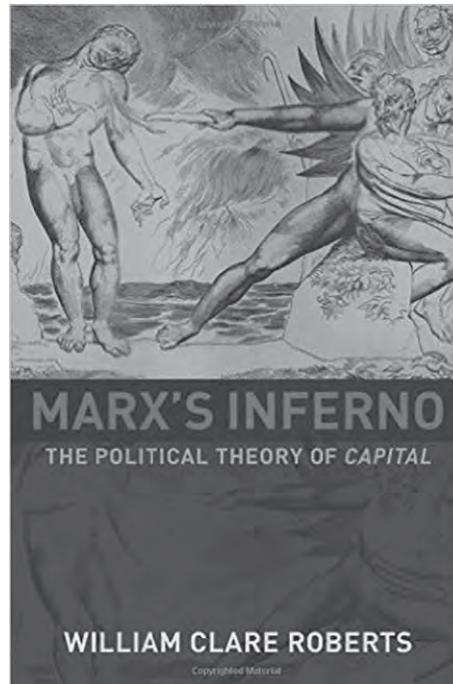
C.J. Polychroniou: Communism has gotten a bad rap as a result of the experience of "actually existing socialism:" the socialist regimes of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. Did Marx have an actual vision of communism? And, if so, how does his ideal communist society relate to republicanism?

William Clare Roberts: Marx's "vision of communism" is notoriously indefinite. I argue that there are good reasons for this. Marx is primarily a diagnostician of domination. He is impressed by the workers' unfreedom, and spent half his life trying to figure out how the institutions that created that unfreedom work. He was convinced that, if the workers knew how their unfreedom was sustained and reproduced, they would be able to figure out how to organize themselves to abolish it.

Part of this confidence, I am convinced, came from the fact that Marx took for granted that republican institutions—well-known in the realm of politics—could be extended to the realm of the economy without grave difficulties. He thought worker-run cooperative factories pointed the way. He thought workers should elect their managers, and that decisions about production, organization and distribution should be subject to political debate. Revolutionary situations—like that of Paris in 1871—saw the common people organizing themselves into networks of communal self-government. Marx took this as confirma-

tion of his faith in the workers' ability to emancipate themselves and create a global framework of interdependent "social republics."

This emancipatory perspective certainly faded over the course of the 20th century. This was in part due to the harshness of war and the ravages of nationalism, not to mention the reactionary terrors that always stalked the ascension of socialists and communists to government. But it was also prepared by the fact that "rational admin-



istration" always vied with freedom as the goal of the socialist movement. From this perspective, it was the "out-of-control"-ness of capitalism that seemed most objectionable. Control and planning seemed more important, therefore, than the equal empowerment of everyone to resist the impositions of others. Command economies resulted in catastrophe.

Equally important, there are real and massive difficulties of logistics and institutional design that confront the effort to organize global cooperative production. The sheer scale of the project boggles the mind. It is very

hard to cooperate, even when it is essential for our continued existence. We don't really know how to do it yet. You can affirm Marx's critical theory of the society ruled by capitalist production in every detail and then affirm that we do not yet know how to replace that society with something better. Rather than a vision of an ideal communist society, we might take from Marx what he offers: a compelling principle of freedom, by which we can evaluate our social and political situation, and a powerful theory of how the capitalist world disregards, endangers and tramples on that freedom. What we can do about it—that we have to supply for ourselves.

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—Truthout, May 4, 2017

<http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/40456-dismantling-domination-what-we-can-learn-about-freedom-from-karl-marx>

Antifa and the Perils of Adventurism

BY LOUIS PROYECT

Ever since the Seattle World Trade Organization protests of 1999, I have observed a dynamic at work that can best be described as “adventurism.” It accepts that peaceful protests might be of some use but the real action involves physical confrontations with the police or ultraright that is far more dramatic and likely to make the front pages of the bourgeois media. During the Vietnam antiwar movement, it was not uncommon for TV networks to make skirmishes on the perimeter of massive demonstrations between ultraleftists and American-flag toting “patriots” the lead story on the evening news. Back then, the demonstrations were highly disciplined affairs with designated marshals often provided by the UAW or other major trade unions. Ultraleftists feeling constrained by the marshals would refer to them as “peace police.”

Since 1999, “diversity of tactics” has prevailed. Nonviolent protestors can do their thing while the black bloc or antifa—the latest manifestation of adventurism—can do theirs. If tear gas and billy-clubs cannot discriminate between the two groups, so what? All you need to do is retreat from the fray, suffering nothing more than irritated eyes or some bruises.

However, there are alarming signs that the stakes are becoming much higher. On May Day this year, Puerto Ricans participated massively in order to show their opposition to the austerity forced upon the country that made it effectively the Greece of the Caribbean. As reported by Ed Morales in *The Nation*, “worker and student groups, faculty members, a feminist contingent, street artists, and an increasingly politicized middle class—coming from different points around the city converged at the Milla de Oro (Golden Mile) in the Hato Rey business district.” He described the protest

as “massive and peaceful...an almost festive atmosphere.” But as the event was coming to an end, black bloc types began throwing rocks at the main headquarters of Banco Popular, the island’s largest bank, breaking windows in a time-dishonored stunt.

The police used this as an excuse to begin wading into peaceful protestors, firing tear gas and using billy clubs on the crowd. TV news that night led, of course, with footage of the black bloc running amok as tear gas dispersed the crowds. Ricardo Rosselló, the rightwing Governor of Puerto Rico, held a press conference to denounce the May Day action, lumping the adventurists in with the peaceful protestors.

That set the agenda for Banco Popular to punish the movement as a whole. It filed a lawsuit claiming damages against 42 plaintiffs, including community organizations and labor unions. Were the masked rock-throwing adventurists agent provocateurs working for the cops? While some probably were, the more likely explanation is a deep-seated belief by politically raw youth that breaking windows and fighting the cops is revolutionary.

Taking advantage of a movement put on the defensive, Rosselló signed legislation that will increase criminal penalties against demonstrators who wear masks. He also made it a crime to obstruct construction sites (up to three years in prison,) a measure designed to curtail union protests, as well as approving fines of up to \$30,000 for interfering with tourist activities. Interference would likely include the closure of an access road to the airport that occurred on May Day, as well as obstructing access to or functions in health or government offices or learning institutions.

Nice work, adventurists.

As bad as the outcome was in Puerto Rico, it looked like the damage could be even much higher in the mother country for people caught up in the chaos that took place on Inauguration Day, once again sparked by black bloc adventurism.

On the morning of January 20th, when Donald Trump was set to be inaugurated, a large group of protestors dressed in black and with their faces covered ran wild through Washington, smashing windows just like their pals in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Once again, the cops threw out a very broad net that included more than two hundred people being arrested. They were charged with felony rioting, facing ten years in prison and a \$25,000 fine. Reporters Alexi Wood and Aaron Cantu, who were swept up in the mass arrests, face seven greater punishments. Wood was charged with five felony property destruction charges and three felony rioting charges. If found guilty, he could be sentenced to 70 years in prison as would Cantu who was faced with similar charges.

Nice work, adventurists.

Turning now to Charlottesville, it is obvious to me that if the protests had been disciplined and under the control of marshals such as was the norm during the Vietnam antiwar movement, there would have been much less of a chance that James Fields would have been able to drive his Dodge Challenger into a crowd, killing a young woman, 32-year-old Heather Heyer, and injuring 19 others.

The antifa contingent came to the city with the intent of turning it into a battle between the fascists and their own street fighters in the same way that it “intervened” at the Berkeley protest against Milo Yiannopoulos. Fortunately, nobody was killed or injured at Berkeley but the protest lacked political clarity.

The same cannot be said about his appearance at the University of Washington in Seattle on Inauguration Day. During a melee between the black bloc and cops outside the hall where Yiannopolous was speaking, IWW member Josh Dukes was shot by Elizabeth Hokoana, a Trump supporter. Her husband Marc was arrested with her as an accomplice. Dukes has lost his gall bladder, half his colon and is left with a severely damaged liver.

If you want to keep tabs of the adventurists who are unaccountable to anybody outside of their ranks, you need to consult the “It’s Going Down” website. There you can read an assessment of the Charlottesville events by an anonymous author, which is typical of the lack of accountability that exists in this milieu. Titled “Charlottesville and the Rise of Fascism in the USA: What We Need to Do,” it is certainly not what one would call an exercise in false modesty.

They credit their window-breaking adventures with inspiring judges to block Muslim bans and government officials to leak information to the press. Gosh, where would we be without them? The boys refer dismissively to nonviolent protestors: “Likewise, it won’t help to gather in churches, as some did in Charlottesville last night, congratulating ourselves on how nonviolent we are while fascists patrol the streets. Last night, when the church locked its doors, many were trapped outside, dramatically outnumbered. This kind of behavior is also complicity.” What ingrates. Cornel West credits them (rather hyperbolically) as saving his life while they charge him as being complicit with white supremacy. It is no wonder that the antifa cult has no concept of broad unity that is so urgently needed today. If you are not ready to get your teeth knocked out by a KKK member in a Rugby-like confrontation, then get lost.

The author does manage to call for unity but the words ring as hollow as

Trump’s follow-up statement on Charlottesville: “As in our efforts against the Trump administration, we can’t take on fascism alone. We have to make sure that we are part of a much broader movement, yet that our efforts are not diluted or reduced to some lowest common denominator.” And what does he expect of us? “We need people to put up posters; we need people to hand out handbills.” Is this idiot for real? The antifa wants us to do grunt work while we have absolutely no voice in their decision-making? On their worst day, the worst “Leninist” sect did not have such arrogance.

There is an implicit ideological assumption in the antifa movement that is worth bringing to the surface and critiquing. In a way, they share the Communist Party’s long-standing obsession with “fascism” that surfaces in every election campaign. They call on people to vote for Hubert Humphrey against Nixon in order to “stop fascism” just as antifa calls on people to get their bones broke or worse taking on fascists who look forward to such confrontation since it gets covered in the bourgeois press that would have zero interest in people like Richard Spencer otherwise.

The enemy is not fascism as much as it is capitalism that exploits the working class according to civilized norms that would never be associated with the swastika or other fascist regalia. How do I know? Just read the *New York Times* op-ed page that screams bloody murder about Trump but gave Obama and Hillary Clinton a free pass. It was, after all, Democratic Party indifference to the suffering of the majority of Americans that led to the current crisis.

In a way, the American antifa movement suffered the same kind of political myopia as the original movement in postwar Germany, where Socialists and Communists tried to root out the residual Nazism left behind in the German state. This history is detailed

in a *Jacobin* article titled “The Lost History of Antifa” written by contributing editor Loren Balhorn who is a member of Die Linke¹.

Antifa groups totaled in the thousands, made up of older industrial workers who managed to elude the Gestapo. They were primarily focused on identifying and bringing to justice Nazis in the same way that Jewish Nazi hunters like Simon Wiesenthal did.

They also fought for social change with Stuttgart being a center of working class resistance to postwar austerity. In 1948 there was anger over drastic price rises that triggered a general strike in which 79 percent of the workforce took part and that spread beyond Stuttgart.

Ultimately, the antifa movement was unable to transform a country that was undergoing massive economic changes orchestrated by the victorious USA. Balhorn cites Albercht Lein throughout his article. Lein was the author of *Antifaschistische Aktion*, a 1978 book that offers an explanation of why the original movement faded from the scene.

Essentially, the movement was focused almost exclusively on tracking down Nazis and failed to develop a strategy for changing German society. In a way, the Communist Party and Socialist Party returned to the *status quo ante* in the new Germany with both parties following its own narrow interests, particularly in the trade unions. The SP was keen on sustaining the alliance with the USA, which promised a return to capitalist normalcy while the CP saw itself—as always—serving the interests of the Soviet Union.

It even reverted back to its sectarian pre-Popular Front period as Balhorn points out:

“Following a brief period of participation in postwar provisional governments, however, the Allies sidelined the KPD (German Communist Party),

and the party soon returned to its ultra-leftist line. It sealed its political irrelevance in 1951 with the passage of “Thesis 37,” a position paper on labor strategy riddled with anti-Social Democratic and anti-trade-union slurs. The motion, passed at the party conference, obligated all KPD members to obey party decisions above and against trade union directives if necessary. This move obliterated Communist support in the factories veritably overnight and relegated the party to society’s fringes. It failed to re-enter parliament in the 1953 elections and was banned by the West German government outright in 1956.

The same kind of divisions between the SP and CP in Germany in the 1920s were responsible for Hitler coming to power, not an unwillingness to engage

in punch-ups as I have heard on *Facebook*. If the SP and the CP had combined forces, they would have been able to elect someone other than Paul von Hindenburg, the rightist who turned over the power to Hitler.

As a small, self-appointed savior of the America people, the antifa milieu has little grasp of the tasks that face us. Right now it is the cops, not Richard Spencer, that are killing Black people with impunity. All across the country, fracking and other forms of environmental despoliation will be on the rise under Donald Trump. This requires a powerful mass movement to confront, not small-scale skirmishes. We are dealing with frightening confrontations over North Korea that cry out for a new anti-nuclear movement, not stupid, childish window-breaking.

I doubt that anybody involved with window-breaking, fist-fighting idiocy is capable of rising to the occasion but I urge people who have been seduced by their fake militancy in the same way that they got a kick out of the viral video of Richard Spencer getting punched to wise up. We are in for some stormy battles and intelligence is needed much more than empty bravado.

—*Louis Proyect: The Unrepentant Marxist*, August 15, 2017

<https://louisproyect.org/2017/08/15/antifa-and-the-perils-of-adventurism/>

1 The Left (German: Die Linke), also commonly referred to as the Left Party is a democratic socialist and left-wing populist political party in Germany.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_\(Germany\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Left_(Germany))

Why Marxists Oppose Individual Terrorism

BY LEON TROTSKY

Our class enemies are in the habit of complaining about our terrorism. What they mean by this is rather unclear. They would like to label all the activities of the proletariat directed against the class enemy’s interests as terrorism. The strike, in their eyes, is the principal method of terrorism. The threat of a strike, the organization of strike pickets, an economic boycott of a slave-driving boss, a moral boycott of a traitor from our own ranks—all this and much more they call terrorism. If terrorism is understood in this way as any action inspiring fear in, or doing harm to, the enemy, then of course the entire class struggle is nothing but terrorism. And the only question remaining is whether the bourgeois politicians have the right to pour out their flood of moral indignation about proletarian terrorism when their entire state apparatus with its laws, police and army is nothing but an apparatus for capitalist terror!

However, it must be said that when they reproach us with terrorism, they are trying—although not always consciously—to give the word a narrower, less indirect meaning. The damaging of machines by workers, for example, is terrorism in this strict sense of the word. The killing of an employer, a threat to set fire to a factory or a death threat to its owner, an assassination attempt, with revolver in hand, against a government minister—all these are terrorist acts in the full and authentic sense. However, anyone who has an idea of the true nature of international Social Democracy ought to know that it has always opposed this kind of terrorism and does so in the most irconcilable way.

Why?

“Terrorizing” with the threat of a strike, or actually conducting a strike is something only industrial workers

can do. The social significance of a strike depends directly upon first, the size of the enterprise or the branch of industry that it affects, and second, the degree to which the workers taking part in it are organized, disciplined, and ready for action. This is just as true of a political strike as it is for an economic one. It continues to be the method of struggle that flows directly from the productive role of the proletariat in modern society.

Belittles the role of the masses

In order to develop, the capitalist system needs a parliamentary superstructure. But because it cannot confine the modern proletariat to a political ghetto, it must sooner or later allow the workers to participate in parliament. In elections, the mass character of the proletariat and its level of political development—quantities, which again, are determined by its social role,

i.e., above all, its productive role—find their expression.

As in a strike, so in elections the method, aim, and result of the struggle always depend on the social role and strength of the proletariat as a class. Only the workers can conduct a strike. Artisans ruined by the factory, peasants whose water the factory is poisoning, or lumpen proletarians in search of plunder can smash machines, set fire to a factory, or murder its owner.

Only the conscious and organized working class can send a strong representation into the halls of parliament to look out for proletarian interests. However, in order to murder a prominent official you need not have the organized masses behind you. The recipe for explosives is accessible to all, and a Browning can be obtained anywhere. In the first case, there is a social struggle, whose methods and means flow necessarily from the nature of the prevailing social order; and in the second, a purely mechanical reaction identical anywhere—in China as in France—very striking in its outward form (murder, explosions and so forth) but absolutely harmless as far as the social system goes.

A strike, even of modest size, has social consequences: strengthening of the workers' self-confidence, growth of the trade union, and not infrequently even an improvement in productive technology. The murder of a factory owner produces effects of a police nature only, or a change of proprietors devoid of any social significance. Whether a terrorist attempt, even a "successful" one throws the ruling class into confusion depends on the concrete political circumstances. In any case the confusion can only be short-lived; the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function.

But the disarray introduced into the ranks of the working masses themselves by a terrorist attempt is much deeper. If it is enough to arm oneself with a pistol in order to achieve one's goal, why the efforts of the class struggle? If a thimbleful of gunpowder and a little chunk of lead is enough to shoot the enemy through the neck, what need is there for a class organization? If it makes sense to terrify highly placed personages with the roar of explosions, where is the need for the party? Why meetings, mass agitation and elections if one can so easily take aim at the ministerial bench from the gallery of parliament?

In our eyes, individual terror is inadmissible precisely because it belittles the role of the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to their powerlessness, and turns their eyes and hopes towards a great avenger and liberator who some day will come and accomplish his mission. The anarchist prophets of the "propaganda of the deed" can argue all they want about the elevating and stimulating influence of terrorist acts on the masses. Theoretical considerations and political experience prove otherwise. The more "effective" the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organization and self-education. But when the smoke from the confusion clears away, the panic disappears, the successor of the murdered minister makes his appearance, life again settles into the old rut, the wheel of capitalist exploitation turns as before; only the police repression grows more savage and brazen. And as a result, in place of the kindled hopes and artificially aroused excitement comes disillusionment and apathy.

The efforts of reaction to put an end to strikes and to the mass workers' movement in general have always, everywhere, ended in failure. Capitalist society needs an active, mobile and intelligent proletariat; it cannot, therefore, bind the proletariat hand and foot for very long. On the other hand, the

anarchist "propaganda of the deed" has shown every time that the state is much richer in the means of physical destruction and mechanical repression than are the terrorist groups.

If that is so, where does it leave the revolution? Is it rendered impossible by this state of affairs? Not at all. For the revolution is not a simple aggregate of mechanical means. The revolution can arise only out of the sharpening of the class struggle, and it can find a guarantee of victory only in the social functions of the proletariat. The mass political strike, the armed insurrection, the conquest of state power—all this is determined by the degree to which production has been developed, the alignment of class forces, the proletariat's social weight, and finally, by the social composition of the army, since the armed forces are the factor that in time of revolution determines the fate of state power.

Social Democracy is realistic enough not to try to avoid the revolution that is developing out of the existing historical conditions; on the contrary, it is moving to meet the revolution with eyes wide open. But—contrary to the anarchists and in direct struggle against them—Social Democracy rejects all methods and means that have as their goal to artificially force the development of society and to substitute chemical preparations for the insufficient revolutionary strength of the proletariat.

Before it is elevated to the level of a method of political struggle, terrorism makes its appearance in the form of individual acts of revenge. So it was in Russia, the classic land of terrorism. The flogging of political prisoners impelled Vera Zasulich to give expression to the general feeling of indignation by an assassination attempt on General Trepov. Her example was imitated in the circles of the revolutionary intelligentsia, who lacked any mass support. What began as an act of unthinking revenge was developed into an entire

system in 1879-81. The outbreaks of anarchist assassination in Western Europe and North America always come after some atrocity committed by the government—the shooting of strikers or executions of political opponents. The most important psychological source of terrorism is always the feeling of revenge in search of an outlet.

There is no need to belabor the point that Social Democracy has nothing in common with those bought-and-paid-for moralists who, in response to any terrorist act, make solemn declarations about the “absolute value” of human life. These are the same people who, on other occasions, in the name of other absolute values—for example, the nation’s honor or the monarch’s prestige—are ready to shove millions of people into the hell of war. Today their national hero is the minister who gives the sacred right of private property; and tomorrow, when the desperate hand of the unemployed workers is clenched into a fist or picks

upon a weapon, they will start in with all sorts of nonsense about the inadmissibility of violence in any form.

Whatever the eunuchs and Pharisees of morality may say, the feeling of revenge has its rights. It does the working class the greatest moral credit that it does not look with vacant indifference upon what is going on in this best of all possible worlds. Not to extinguish the proletariat’s unfulfilled feeling of revenge, but on the contrary to stir it up again and again, to deepen it, and to direct it against the real causes of all injustice and human baseness—that is the task of the Social Democracy.

If we oppose terrorist acts, it is only because individual revenge does not satisfy us. The account we have to settle with the capitalist system is too great to be presented to some functionary called a minister. To learn to see all the crimes against humanity, all the indignities to which the human body and spirit are subjected, as the twisted outgrowths and expressions of the existing social

system, in order to direct all our energies into a collective struggle against this system—that is the direction in which the burning desire for revenge can find its highest moral satisfaction.

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—Marxist.org, December 17, 2006

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1911/11/tia09.htm>

the capitalist state does not base itself on government ministers and cannot be eliminated with them. The classes it serves will always find new people; the mechanism remains intact and continues to function.

Counter-Mobilization

A strategy to fight racist and fascist attacks

BY FARRELL DOBBS

Political Report to the June 1961 Socialist Workers Party Convention (excerpt)

The current outbreak of rightist movements—Youth for Goldwater, John Birch Society, the extremist American Nazis, *etc.*—requires close attention and it also poses some tactical questions that need clarification. Implicit in this trend is the ultimate danger of repressive fascist attacks on labor and its allies, against which the labor movement will have to wage a showdown struggle in the streets. But it would be a serious mistake to raise a hue and cry against incipient fascism, as though the ultimate danger were already upon us, and attempt to substitute ourselves for the masses in taking

the issue to the streets here and now. National politics still remains class collaborationist in mass character, despite the growing restiveness of labor and its allies. While this class political equilibrium remains operative, fascism can’t make significant headway. When the present equilibrium does become upset through a labor breakaway from capitalist politics, it does not necessarily follow that capitalism will resort forthwith to fascist measures. An attempt might be made, as class political antagonism sharpen, to establish Bonapartist rule, perhaps through a military dictatorship based on the present vast interlocking alliance between the officer corps and the monopoly capitalists. Fascist trends would receive strong

new impulses at such a juncture, but the ultimate showdown with fascism would still not be at hand. Therefore our propaganda, in addition to explaining the meaning of fascism and educating the masses in the need to be on guard against it, must also analyze the complex interim questions of the power struggles which could be next on the agenda.

At the present time, given the class collaborationist character of national politics, the existing rightist formations simply represent vanguard polarizations on the right, which play the counterpart of our vanguard role on the left. They can do little more than conduct propaganda, resorting only to isolated, small-scale acts of hooligan-

ism, which often backfire against them. Since the incipient fascists are not strong enough to carry through anti-democratic actions at present, a call for mobilization against them would give the general impression of an attempt on our part to suppress freedom of speech and assembly for others. We would not only be inviting comparable attacks, both legal and extra-legal, against our own democratic rights, but we would appear to have given them justification. The truth is that we stand for freedom of speech and assembly in principle—not just for us, but for everybody. Therefore, we do not demand that the rightist movements be denied these freedoms.

The truth is that we stand for freedom of speech and assembly in principle—not just for us, but for everybody. Therefore, we do not demand that the rightist movements be denied these freedoms.

Concerning the question of civil liberties, we should keep in mind that our growing reputation as a serious revolutionary tendency with a meaningful program is drawing attention not only from people becoming radicalized. The witch hunters are taking notice as well. We are beginning to draw their fire to a new degree in connection with the Cuban defense movement and there could be other new attacks. More than ever we must be on guard against any undermining of civil liberties for all, if we hope to defend our own democratic rights. To act otherwise would be to repeat the costly mistake of the Stalinists in refusing to recognize the democratic rights of their political opponents.

“the working class in the capitalist countries, threatened with their own enslavement must stand in defense of freedom for all political tendencies including their own irreconcilable enemies.”

Let me call to your attention an article Trotsky wrote on this subject in December 1939 in the *Socialist Appeal* under the title, “Why I Consented to Appear Before The Dies Committee.”

The questions of Stalinist dictatorship, of democratic rights under capitalism and the policy of revolutionists on civil liberties in a capitalist country like ours came up in this discussion. Trotsky wrote in the article cited, “Being an irreconcilable opponent not only of fascism but also of the present-day Comintern, I am at the same time decidedly against the suppression of either of them.” He pointed out that the suppression of fascists by the capitalist government always proves fictitious. He also took note of the fact that to defend the rights of the Stalinists could help to refurbish the Comintern. “However,” he said, “the question is not exhausted by this consideration. Under the conditions of the bourgeois regime, all suppression of political rights and freedom, no matter whom they are directed against in the beginning, in the end inevitably bear down upon the working class, particularly its most advanced elements. That is a law of history.”

In the article Trotsky was speaking of a specific stage, the one we’re in now, where we’re struggling under adverse conditions against a repressive ruling class in a capitalist country. He pointed out that when the struggle intensifies into a class showdown a new

factor arises, the rules of civil war, which are something else again. But concerning a situation such as ours, he stated unambiguously “the working class in the capitalist countries, threatened with their own enslavement must stand in defense of freedom for all political tendencies including their own irreconcilable enemies.”

Under circumstances where the foregoing policy will be maintained, we may at times find it useful propagandistically to organize counter-demonstrations against incipient fascists. In any situation where they resort to rightist hooliganism we will take the initiative in organizing defense guards to oppose them. But our central task at this stage concerning the rightist formations is to explain the true nature of fascism in our propaganda, seeking to educate and alert the masses against it. In doing so we must keep a sense of proportion as to the immediate nature of the fascist issue, being careful to direct major attention to the primary questions of the day.

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—*Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On-Line*

<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp-us/education/courter/dobbs.htm>

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Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by revolutionaries who share a common political outlook stemming from the old Socialist Workers Party of James P. Cannon, and Socialist Action from 1984 through 1999.

After being expelled from Socialist Action in 1999, we formed Socialist Workers Organization in an attempt to carry on the project of building a nucleus of a revolutionary party true to the historic teachings and program of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

What we have found is that our numbers are insufficient for this crucial project of party building. This problem is not ours alone; it is a problem flowing from the division and fragmentation that has plagued the revolutionary movement in capitalist America and the world since the 1980s.

What we intend to do is to continue to promote the idea of building a revolutionary Marxist working class political party through the pages of *Socialist Viewpoint* magazine. We continue to have an optimistic outlook about the revolutionary potential of the world working class to rule society in its own name—socialism. We are optimistic that the working class, united across borders, and acting in its own class interests can solve the devastating crises of war, poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction that capitalism is responsible for.

We expect that revolutionaries from many different organizations, traditions, and backgrounds will respond to the opportunities that will arise, as workers resist the attacks of the capitalist system and government, to build a new revolutionary political party. Just as we join with others to build every response to war and oppression, we look forward to joining with others in the most important work of building a new mass revolutionary socialist workers' party as it becomes possible to do so.

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Lorenzo Johnson Free!

“I had to end their pain:” Lorenzo Johnson says he took plea deal for his family

By MATT MILLER



Lorenzo Johnson with wife, Tazza

In the end, Lorenzo Johnson said he did it for his family because, “I had to end their pain.”

That pain had throbbled for nearly 22 years, ever since Johnson received a life prison sentence for a 1995 Harrisburg murder he insists he didn't commit.

So on Tuesday afternoon, July 11, 2017, Johnson said he put his relatives first, swallowed what he called a “bitter pill,” and accepted a plea deal with the state attorney general's office that at long last set him free.

That deal did come with a catch, however, in that it still saddles him with a murder conviction.

The New York man's freedom came when Senior Judge Lawrence F. Clark Jr. accepted his no contest pleas to third-degree murder and conspiracy charges for the December 1995 slaying of Tarajay Williams.

Clark promptly sentenced the 47-year-old Johnson to ten to 20 years in prison, then ordered his immediate

parole. Clark also ordered Johnson to serve five years of probation, and allowed him to do so at his home in Westchester County, New York.

Moments later, a visibly emotional Johnson left the Dauphin County Courthouse surrounded by dozens of his relieved and joyful family, friends and attorneys.

Even as he headed for the exit, Johnson paused for a moment and once again insisted he had nothing to do with Williams' murder in an alley off the 1400 block of Market Street.

“This decision was for my family. It wasn't for me,” he said when asked why he took the plea deal. “I've been innocent from day one. I still stand on that.”

“I should have been walking out fully exonerated,” he added.

Johnson has argued that he wasn't even near the scene when Williams was killed. He has insisted that prosecution witnesses lied and that he was prepared to keep pressing an appeal in which he claimed the prosecution wrongly withheld evidence from the defense that would have resulted in an acquittal during his three-day trial in 1996.

His decades-long legal battle was brought to Tuesday's finish line by his lawyer, Michael Wiseman, working in tandem with the Pennsylvania Innocence Project.

Yet Senior Deputy Attorney General William Stoycos did not concede that Johnson is innocent of Williams' murder. That much was clear in the statement he read into the court record as part of Johnson's plea agreement.

Stoycos said prosecutors were prepared to present evidence that Johnson was an accomplice to Williams' murder and that witnesses placed him at the scene.

Stoycos said Johnson was present when Corey Walker killed Williams with a shotgun blast to the chest because Williams was refusing to pay money he owed. The three men had argued and Williams had previously beaten Walker with a broomstick, the prosecutor said.

He said witnesses placed Williams, Walker and Johnson together in the four-foot-wide alley when Williams was killed and that Walker and Johnson were seen nearby right after the slaying. A defense witness lied in exchange for bail money to try to give Johnson an alibi, Stoycos said.

None of that is true, Johnson insisted as he gave an impromptu statement on his way to the courthouse exit. He said Walker, who is serving a life prison sentence for the slaying, is innocent as well.

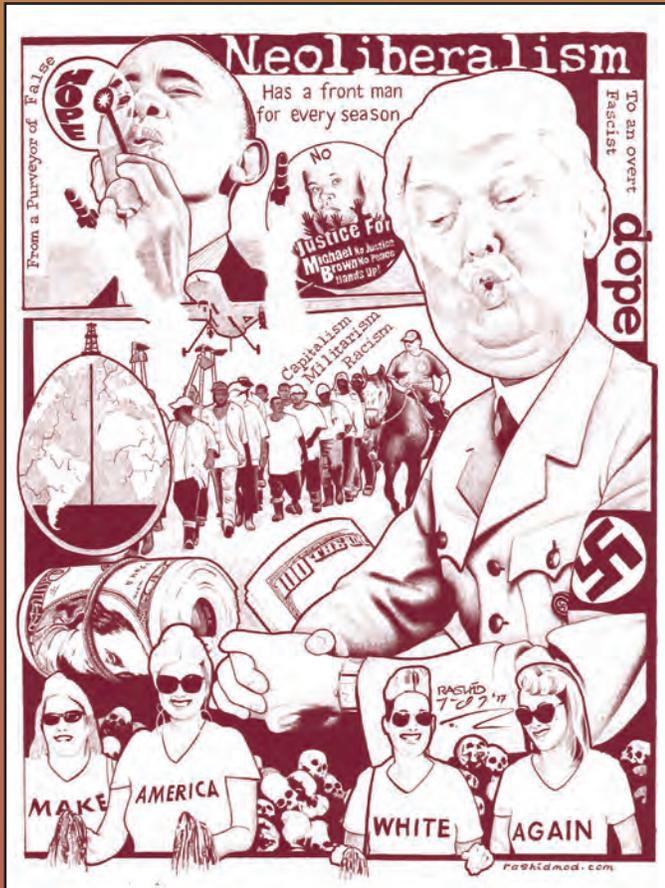
“Obviously we challenge these facts,” Wiseman said after Stoycos read his statement during the sentencing hearing. Johnson only admits that Stoycos outlined what the prosecution would present had a new trial been ordered, Wiseman said.

Johnson said nothing when Clark gave him the chance right before imposing the new liberating sentence. “It is the court's understanding that you have discussed this agreement up, down, sideways, every way possible with your counsel,” the judge observed.

Wiseman told Clark that Johnson “is a gentle person of the highest order. He has shown strength and integrity... He is an inspiration to me. This is the happiest day of my professional career.”

Johnson displayed persistence through years of appeals and kept fighting even after the U.S. Supreme Court ordered him back to prison in 2012 after a federal appeals court ruling briefly freed him, Wiseman said.

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“Neoliberalism,” Artwork by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson. Read *Rashid Will Not Be Silenced* on page 62.



Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky, leaders of the Russian Revolution, October 1917. Read *Russian Revolution and Workers Democracy* on page 14.

On the Front Cover: On April 19, 2017 as many as 40,000 counter protesters marched against a right-wing “free speech” rally in Boston one week after a white-supremacist rally in Charlottesville led to violence that killed one counter protester and injured dozens more.



Bob King (UAW President), General Holiefield (UAW VP), Scott Gaberding (Fiat Chrysler), Al Iacobelli (Fiat Chrysler) at the opening of 2011 negotiations. Read *Fiat Chrysler/UAW Corruption Case* on page 52.



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. Safely* ruling. [482 U.S. 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987)] If you exclude printed matter on an improper basis, or give a false pretext or rationale for its exclusion, because of the ideas expressed in it, you are breaking the law. The prisoner denied access to material he wants to read can bring a civil rights lawsuit against you with cause for seeking punitive damages. In the case of *Police Department Chicago v. Mosley*, 408 U.S. 92, 95, 92 Sct 2286, 2290 (1972) the court found that “[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, subject matter or content.”