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

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Merger Mania: the Military Industrial Complex on Steroids - Page 8
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Organizers of upcoming global climate strikes hope their demands for a rapid end to business as usual and a swift start to climate justice will be too loud to ignore.

The strikes, which are set for September 20th and 27th—with additional actions slated for the days in between—are planned in over 150 countries thus far, and over 6,000 people have already pledged to take part.

It has the potential to be the biggest climate mobilization yet, said organizers.

“Our house is on fire—let’s act like it,” says the strikes’ call-to-action, referencing the words of Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. “We demand climate justice for everyone.”

Thunberg echoed that call in a just-released video promoting the upcoming actions.

“Everyone should mobilize for the 20th and 27th of September,” said Thunberg, “because this is a global issue which actually affects everyone.”

It’s been the world’s youth, though, that have played a driving force in recently calling attention to the climate crisis with protests and school strikes.

“Young people have been leading here,” 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben said in the Thunberg video, “but now it’s the job of the rest of us to back them up.”

The two Fridays of action, according to organizers, will bookend a “Week for Future” to sustain the climate call. Nestled between is the United Nations Summit on Climate Change on September 23rd in New York.

“Because we don’t have a single year to lose,” said Luisa Neubauer of Fridays for Future Germany in a press statement Wednesday, “we’re going to make this week a turning point in history.”

The upcoming protests reflect a call form a diverse group of global organizations, including Amnesty International, Oxfam, La Via Campesina, Fridays for Future, and Extinction Rebellion.

The Youth Climate Strike Coalition, which includes Sunrise Movement and Zero Hour, issued a press statement Wednesday focusing on U.S. actions on September 20th.

“The youth uprising,” said 350.org North America director Tamara Toles O’Laughlin, “is backed by millions who refuse to sit by while the Trump administration, hand-in-hand with fossil fuel executives, continues their campaign of climate denial and policy rollbacks, all while we face extreme heat waves, hurricanes, floods, and wildfires.”

“We stand with communities demanding economic transformation that works for our collective right to a sustainable, healthy, and livable future,” she continued.

Back up the need for the mobilization is ample evidence of the climate crisis. As the Global Climate Strike website sums up:

Our house is on fire.
Our hotter planet is already hurting millions of people.

We need to act right now to stop burning fossil fuels and ensure a rapid energy revolution with equity, reparations, and climate justice at its heart.

The intergenerational and global actions, according to the global organizers, can serve to show the size of chorus of those demanding and end to the fossil fuel economy, bring out those previously on the sidelines of the climate justice fight, and “kickstart a huge wave of action and renewed ambition all over the world.”

To make that happen, massive turnout is necessary, said Evan Cholerton of Earth Strike International.

“Multinational corporations aren’t going to give up anything unless we fight,” he said.

“This is a fight for ourselves, for our future, and for future generations,” continued Cholerton. “This is a fight for justice for all: workers, students, parents, teachers, conservatives, liberals, socialists, and everyone else. We can fight against climate breakdown, and we can fight against environmental destruction. We need to all be part of this, or else the establishment won’t budge.”

“We can do this,” he added, “if we do this together.”

—Common Dreams, July 24, 2019
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“Golden Bullets of Dollarism”

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

“The oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them.” — Karl Marx

The Democratic Party is not the “lesser evil” party. In fact, Harry S. Truman, as the Democratic Party President of the United States, was responsible for carrying out the dropping of the atomic bombs, “Little Boy” on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and “Fat Man” on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, that resulted in between 129,000 and 226,000 people, mostly civilians, being killed instantly—the only use of nuclear weapons in armed combat in the world to date.

Truman didn’t do this on his own, but with the consent of the commanders of what would become the most powerful capitalist countries in the world.

There has been a discussion regarding the pros and cons of supporting Democratic Party candidates who call themselves socialists and who “use the Democratic Party ballot line” to get elected.

The underlying rationale is that the Democratic Party is the lesser evil of the two main capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans. However, all capitalist parties are under the control of the imperialist commanders of capital lock, stock and barrel—with their fingers on the triggers of the biggest nuclear arsenals on the planet.

They can’t be transformed into parties representing those of us who the capitalists oppress—the working class—nor can they allow their candidates, no matter what they call themselves, to represent anything but the needs of the capitalist class. And this includes Bernie Sanders who is credited with popularizing “socialism.”

People, like Sanders, who call themselves socialists and consciously use the Democratic Party to further their political careers, instead of using their status to defend the working class, use their socialist rhetoric to further their political careers and draw workers into the Democratic Party.

The capitalist class would never allow a real socialist candidate to run under their banner and, more importantly, out of their control.

These people are career politicians. Their goal is to either move up from Mayor to Governor to Senator to President, or, at least, to keep a career in “politics.” They have not entered into politics to end capitalism.

Bernie Sanders is not part of an independent revolutionary socialist organization nor is he trying to build such an organization outside of the Democratic Party.

Critical support to Democratic Party candidates is based on the idea that capitalism can be significantly reformed through its electoral process and will aid in winning reforms for the working class.

While winning reforms are certainly a part of the struggle of workers—equal pay for equal work, free universal healthcare and education for all, housing for all—these will never be realized by electing candidates that are part of the parties of the capitalist class.

They will only be realized, as they always have, by mass action and organization outside of, and wholly independent of those parties, and in unity and solidarity with one another.

Austerity reforms?

As revolutionary socialists we recognize that capitalism can’t grant all the reforms workers need. At this stage of the descent of capitalism into barbarism the only thing the capitalist system can offer workers is austerity—the choice between less and less. This is what’s happening everywhere across the globe.

As revolutionary socialists we know that no socio-economic transformation of society has ever been achieved through reforms within the power structure of that society.

Supporting (critically or otherwise) candidates of the parties of the capitalist class is deceptive because it implies that the system can be changed through such reforms as long as we elect the correct capitalist candidates.

The only solution is socialist revolution

Workers’ democratic control over the means of production and the establishment of socialism is the only solution to austerity, unending war and the destruction of our environment. And it is the only road to the reversal of the current descent into barbarism.

Working class democratic control over society is the goal of revolutionary socialism and, practically speaking, the only thing that will save the world.

This cannot be reformed into being. Supporting radical sounding or so-called socialist candidates of capitalist parties (because one can’t really distin-
guish between them) muddies the truth that the system of capitalism itself is the real enemy of the working class.

Reforms and revolution

Revolutionary socialism is not just about fighting for reforms or demands. World capitalism is no longer able to grant those demands.

The $15.00-per-hour minimum wage, while it’s better than nothing, is ridiculously inadequate. Even in the poorest areas of the country where $15.00-per-hour would be a living wage, there aren’t enough jobs to be had in the first place. And in the majority of the cities and towns in this country one would need at least three, full-time $15.00-per-hour jobs just to rent a three-room apartment, let alone support a family. Those are the facts. We are beyond pressuring elected officials to grant these tiny reforms that don’t count.

We need to organize independently of the capitalist class and their parties. We need to show the working class that we have strength and power on our own because we do. This is Socialism, (i.e., Marxism) 101. Supporting the candidates of capitalist parties weakens us. It ties our hands to the capitalist system to resolve our problems. It’s a dead end.

Reformism is not the same as revolutionary socialism. We can’t make that distinction clear if we lend our support to capitalist politicians no matter what they call themselves.

Conveniently, the four liberal Democratic candidates running for President, Cory Booker (Democrat, New Jersey;) Kamala Harris (Democrat, California;) Elizabeth Warren, (Democrat, Massachusetts;) and Bernie Sanders, (Independent from Vermont who calls himself a socialist;) did not vote against H.R. 3877, the two-year Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019, which increases military and domestic spending by $320 billion over two years. Instead, they simply did not vote.

But Bernie has voted for war, money for Israel, etc., in the past. And he asked us to vote for one of the most brutal war mongers ever running for president, Hillary Clinton, with his campaign slogan of “follow me to Hillary” after his bid for the nomination went down the tubes.

Yes, it is good people are talking about socialism, but it’s the job of revolutionary socialists to clarify what socialism means and how it will be achieved—specifically through mass, independent struggle of the working class and our allies. Calling capitalist candidates socialists will not clarify anything.

‘Do not allow yourself to be seduced by the trappings of the enemy system because they will weaken your resolve to be strong.’

The pro-capitalist, imperialist leaders of the Democratic Party didn’t have to do anything to get Sanders to capitulate and support Hillary. When he saw the polls showing Trump moving ahead, he folded all on his own.

And that’s the point. Bernie’s idea of socialism is the Swedish or Norwegian model. But those countries are also enforcing austerity—cutting back on social welfare programs and privatizing them because they are capitalist countries that called themselves socialist to win over their population.

Workers in those countries are finding it necessary to augment their healthcare with private insurance packages that offer what austerity has cut.

U.S. insurance companies are descending on those countries like flies on shit to sell their insurance policies, further cutting back the living standards of workers. It’s happening throughout the world.

Therein lies the problem. Sanders has already capitulated once and he will again because he’s not really a socialist. The capitalist class would never allow a real socialist candidate to run under their banner and, more importantly, out of their control.

Directing workers to put their all into such campaigns as Sanders’ takes the wind out of the real, necessary, independent organizing and action of the working class.

Holt Labor Library

The library is moving to Southern California. Watch this space for further information.

Labor Studies & Radical History

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- Audiotapes of classes by Tom Kerry & Larry Trainor

Visit us on the web: http://www.holtlaborlibrary.org
It gives false hope that electing a candidate or participating in electoral politics alone can achieve all the reforms workers need to survive—all the reforms the world needs to keep the planet from being destroyed.

**Building a mass workers party**

The only good reason for participating in capitalist electoral politics is to facilitate the building of a mass, independent workers party and movement that can effectively challenge the rule of capital.

We know that the only solution to the plight of the working class and the planet is socialist revolution—the complete overthrow of the capitalist mode of production for profit and replacing it with a system of production for want and need, democratically controlled by the working class—to end hunger, homelessness, oppression and inequality.

To achieve this, we have to build an independent working class electoral intervention. This cannot just be an independent struggle for demands, which are an essential component of our struggle—but we must build a mass labor party that is totally independent of the parties of the bosses.

This is the fundamental first stage for the working class to realize our power to actually take control of society and structure it to our advantage in diametric opposition to capitalism.

There is no shortcut to this essential work. If we, as revolutionary socialists don’t advocate the necessity of this—teach the lessons of the mistakes that were made that lead to World Wars I and II—then we will be faced with World War III and, most probably, the end of the human species.

This is our most fundamental task. We can’t substitute fake socialism for the real thing. It will only lead to defeat and demoralization.

History has shown us that defeat and demoralization delays the deepening of consciousness of workers. It leads us to think, “what the hell’s the use of fighting when it will only lead to defeat?”

Winning real reforms through independent working class struggle will lead to the realization of our power and strength and encourage us to continue the fight.

Only through working class independent organization and action will we feel our own power and realize that those who have taken away the reforms we have won in the past are our class enemies who can’t be trusted and must be removed from power over us.

The question is just that, how to organize the fight against oppression and exploitation while raising the consciousness of the working class that capitalism itself is the problem.

This can’t be achieved if we support the candidates of the parties of capital—the parties of war, racism, sexism and oppression of the masses of humanity on the planet. It is an oxymoron to support capitalist politicians while fighting capitalism.

**A small yet profound case in point**

On April 20, 2019, The New Afrikan Black Panther Party (NABPP) organized a demonstration in Newark, New Jersey, in front of West Side High School to protest a proposed new youth prison to be built near the school—a real life example of the school-to-prison pipeline.

It was pointed out that the school is situated with an elementary school behind it, a playground across the street, a graveyard next door, and, if the prison were to be built, a direct pipeline from elementary school, to high school, to prison and then the graveyard.

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<th>17.</th>
<th>Publication of Statement of Ownership: September/October 2019, Vol. 19, No. 5</th>
<th>18. Signature and title of Editor, Publisher, or Owner</th>
<th>Bonnie Weinstein, Co-Editor</th>
</tr>
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<td>9/12/2019</td>
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It was a very small demonstration but subsequent demonstrations took place in May protesting more prisons in New Jersey. And on May 18th there was a large and vocal demonstration of hundreds of youth protesting the prison system.

Lessons from the April 20th demonstration

*New Jersey Revolution Radio* recorded interviews with the organizers of the April 20th demonstration called by the NABPP.

At the very end of the *YouTube* video, Shaka Sankofa Zulu, the chairman of the Newark chapter of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party railed against Newark’s Democratic Mayor, Ras Baraka who, before he was elected stated, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and promised to be Newark’s “radical” Mayor who was described as being a “native son from activist royalty.”

Chairman Shaka then gave his remarks in front of West Side High School:

“...Ras Baraka used the golden bullets of dollarism to seduce the activists in this community and as a result, the job they have, the car they have, the status they have is more important than a child’s life—more important than a child’s future. ...We’re going to be here...because we’re not going to stand for a Black capitalist or a white capitalist or any kind of capitalist to come into our community to take the money out of town by sundown—and Ras Baraka is doing that.

“...Our children are dying; our children are crying; our parents are helpless, hopeless, our community is blighted. ...Don’t tell me, ‘I’m a Mayor today so I can’t be an activist’...because it’s not about seizing power and then your responsibility ends. It’s about building the nation—about building the people.

“Ras Baraka, they put you there because they thought you was going to build the nation, build the city but instead you are throwing kids to the wolves, to the hyenas, the vulture capitalists, the hedge fund managers. ...Ras Baraka wants to build a prison to tear the community down, to put more cops on the street. Shame on you, Ras Baraka.

“...And Martin Luther King said something...and Malcolm X said it too, ‘Do not allow yourself to be seduced by the trappings of the enemy system because they will weaken your resolve to be strong.’ We say...death...to this prison. We’re gonna put our lives on the line. ...And Ras Baraka, over our dead bodies will we allow you to incarcerate our children’s future.”

There can be no clearer example today of the wrong-thinking of giving support—critical or otherwise—to any candidate representing the parties of the capitalist class no matter what they call themselves or how radical they sound.

Rally for youth prison reform, Newark, New Jersey, May 18, 2019. The banner, “150 Years is Enough” refers to the opening of the Jamesburg youth prison for boys 150 years ago. (Photo courtesy of NJISJ)

They represent the class enemy of the working class.

Our power is in our unity and complete independence from the capitalist class and their political parties.

Only by organizing independent, revolutionary socialist parties of the working class we will finally realize our power to end capitalism and establish socialism everywhere and for everyone.

---


2 View the full video of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party protest, on April 19, 2019, of a proposed new youth prison near West Side High School in Newark, New Jersey. Video interviews recorded by *New Jersey Revolution Radio.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7YsK8jHSns](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7YsK8jHSns)


4 This excerpt was transcribed by Bonnie Weinstein.
When, in his farewell address in 1961, President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the dangers of the “unwarranted influence” wielded by the “military-industrial complex,” he could never have dreamed of an arms-making corporation of the size and political clout of Lockheed Martin. In a good year, it now receives up to $50 billion in government contracts, a sum larger than the operating budget of the State Department. And now it’s about to have company.

Raytheon, already one of the top five U.S. defense contractors, is planning to merge with United Technologies. That company is a major contractor in its own right, producing, among other things, the engine for the F-35 combat aircraft, the most expensive Pentagon weapons program ever. The new firm will be second only to Lockheed Martin when it comes to consuming your tax dollars—and it may end up even more powerful politically, thanks to President Trump’s fondness for hiring arms industry executives to run the national security state.

Just as Boeing benefited from its former Senior Vice President Patrick Shanahan’s stint as acting secretary of defense, so Raytheon is likely to cash in on the nomination of its former top lobbyist, Mike Esper, as his successor. Esper’s elevation comes shortly after another former Raytheon lobbyist, Charles Faulkner, left the State Department amid charges that he had improperly influenced decisions to sell Raytheon-produced guided bombs to Saudi Arabia for its brutal air war in Yemen. John Rood, third-in-charge at the Pentagon, has worked for both Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, while Ryan McCarthy, Mike Esper’s replacement as secretary of the Army, worked for Lockheed on the F-35, which the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) has determined may never be ready for combat.

And so it goes. There was a time when Donald Trump was enamored of “his” generals—Secretary of Defense James Mattis (a former board member of the weapons-maker General Dynamics), National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster, and White House Chief of Staff John Kelly. Now, he seems to have a crush on personnel from the industrial side of the military-industrial complex.

...in 2018 alone, 645 senior government officials—mostly from the Pentagon, the uniformed military, and Capitol Hill—went to work as executives, consultants, or board members of one of the top 20 defense contractors...

As POGO’s research has demonstrated, the infamous “revolving door” that deposits defense executives like Esper in top national security posts swings both ways. The group estimates that, in 2018 alone, 645 senior government officials—mostly from the Pentagon, the uniformed military, and Capitol Hill—went to work as executives, consultants, or board members of one of the top 20 defense contractors.

Fifty years ago, Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire identified the problem when he noted that:

“the movement of high ranking military officers into jobs with defense contractors and the reverse movement of top executives in major defense contractors into high Pentagon jobs is solid evidence of the military-industrial complex in operation. It is a real threat to the public interest because it increases the chances of abuse...How hard a bargain will officers involved in procurement planning or specifications drive when they are one or two years away from retirement and have the example to look at of over 2,000 fellow officers doing well on the outside after retirement?”

In other words, that revolving door and the problems that go with it are anything but new. Right now, however, it seems to be spinning faster than ever—and mergers like the Raytheon-United Technologies one are only likely to feed the phenomenon.

The last supper

The merger of Raytheon and United Technologies should bring back memories of the merger boom of the 1990s, when Lockheed combined with Martin Marietta to form Lockheed Martin, Northrop and Grumman formed Northrop Grumman, and Boeing absorbed rival military aircraft manufacturer McDonnell Douglas. And it wasn’t just a matter of big firms pairing up either. Lockheed Martin itself was the product of mergers and acquisitions involving nearly two-dozen companies—distinctly a tale of big fish chowing down on little fish. The consolidation of the arms industry in those years was strongly encouraged by Clinton administration Secretary of Defense William Perry, who held a dinner with defense executives that was later dubbed “the last supper.” There, he reportedly told the assembled corporate officials that a third of them would be out of business in five years if they didn’t merge with one of their cohorts.
The Clinton administration’s encouragement of defense industry mergers would prove anything but rhetorical. It would, for instance, provide tens-of-millions-of-dollars in merger subsidies to pay for the closing of plants, the moving of equipment, and other necessities. It even picked up part of the tab for the golden parachutes given defense executives and corporate board members ousted in those deals.

The most egregious case was surely that of Norman Augustine. The CEO of Martin Marietta, he would actually take over at the helm of the even more powerful newly created Lockheed Martin. In the process, he received $8.2 million in payments, technically for leaving his post as head of Martin Marietta. U.S. taxpayers would cover more than a third of his windfall. Then, a congressman who has only gained stature in recent years, Representative Bernie Sanders (I-VT), began to fight back against those merger subsidies. He dubbed them “payoffs for layoffs” because executives got government-funded bailouts, while an estimated 19,000 workers were laid off in the Lockheed Martin merger alone with no particular taxpayer support. Sanders was actually able to shepherd through legislation that clawed back some, but not all, of those merger subsidies.

According to one argument in favor of the merger binge then, by closing half-empty factories, the new firms could charge less overhead and taxpayers would benefit. Well, dream on. This never came near happening, because the newly merged industrial behemoths turned out to have even greater bargaining power over the Pentagon and Congress than the unmerged companies that preceded them.

Draw your own conclusions about what’s likely to happen in this next round of mergers, since cost overruns and lucrative contracts continue apace. Despite this dismal record, Raytheon CEO Thomas Kennedy claims that the new corporate pairing will—you guessed it!—save the taxpayers money. Don’t hold your breath.

The Clinton administration’s encouragement of defense industry mergers would prove anything but rhetorical. It would, for instance, provide tens-of-millions-of-dollars in merger subsidies to pay for the closing of plants, the moving of equipment, and other necessities. It even picked up part of the tab for the golden parachutes given defense executives and corporate board members ousted in those deals.

Influence on steroids
While Donald Trump briefly expressed reservations about the Raytheon-United Technologies merger and a few members of Congress struck notes of caution, it has been welcomed eagerly on Wall Street. Among the reasons given: the fact that the two companies generally make different products, so their union shouldn’t reduce competition in any specific sector of defense production. It has also been claimed that the new combo, to be known as Raytheon Technologies, will have more funds available for research and development on the weapons of the future.

But focusing on such concerns misses the big picture. Raytheon Technologies will have more money to make campaign contributions, more money to hire lobbyists, and more production sites that can be used as leverage over members of Congress to oppose spending on weapons produced in their states or districts. The classic example of this phenomenon: the F-35 program, which Lockheed Martin claims produces 125,000 jobs spread over 46 states.

When I took a careful look at the company’s estimates, I found that they were claiming approximately twice as many jobs as that weapons system was actually creating. In fact, more than half of F-35-related employment was in just two states, California and Texas (though many other states did have modest numbers of F-35 jobs). Even if Lockheed Martin’s figures are exaggerated, however, there’s no question that spreading defense jobs around the country gives weapons manufacturers unparalleled influence over key members of Congress, much to their benefit when Pentagon budget time rolls around. In fact, it’s a commonplace for Congress to fund more F-35s, F-18s, and similar weapons systems than the Pentagon ever asks for. So much for Congressional oversight.

Theoretically, incoming defense secretary Mike Esper will have to recuse himself from major decisions involving his former company. Among them, whether to continue selling Raytheon-produced precision-guided bombs to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for their devastating air war in Yemen that has killed remarkable numbers of civilians.

No worries. President Trump himself is the biggest booster in living memory of corporate arms sales and Saudi Arabia is far and away his favorite customer. The Senate recently voted
down a package of “emergency” arms sales to the Saudis and the UAE that included thousands of Raytheon Paveway munitions, the weapon of choice in that Yemeni air campaign. A similar vote must now take place in the House, but even if it, too, passes, Congress will need to override a virtually guaranteed Trump veto of the bill.

The Raytheon-United Technologies merger will further implicate the new firm in Yemeni developments because the Pratt and Whitney division of United Technologies makes the engine for Saudi Arabia’s key F-15S combat aircraft, a mainstay of the air war there. Not only will Raytheon Technologies profit from such engine sales, but that company’s technicians are likely to help maintain the Saudi air force, thereby enabling it to fly yet more bombing missions more often.

When pressed, Raytheon officials argue that, in enabling mass slaughter, they are simply following U.S. government policy. This ignores the fact that Raytheon and other weapons contractors spend tens-of-millions of dollars-a-year on lobbyists, political contributions, and other forms of influence peddling trying to shape U.S. policies on arms exports and weapons procurement. They are, in other words, anything but passive recipients of edicts handed down from Washington. ...it’s a commonplace for Congress to fund more F-35s, F-18s, and similar weapons systems than the Pentagon even asks for. So much for Congressional oversight...

As Raytheon chief financial officer Toby O’Brien put it in a call to investors that came after the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, “We continue to be aligned with the administration’s policies, and we intend to honor our commitments.” Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson made a similar point, asserting that “most of these agreements that we have are government-to-government purchases, so anything that we do has to follow strictly the regulations...Beyond that, we’ll just work with the U.S. government as they are continuing their relationship with [the Saudis].”

How powerful are the military-industrial combines? When it comes to lobbying the Pentagon and Congress, size matters. Major firms like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and Raytheon can point to the jobs they and their subcontractors provide in dozens of states and scores of Congressional districts to keep members of Congress in line who might otherwise question or even oppose the tens-of-billions-of-dollars in government funding the companies receive annually.

Raytheon—its motto: “Customer Success Is Our Mission”—has primary operations in 17 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. That translates into a lot of leverage over key members of Congress and it doesn’t even count states where the company has major subcontractors. The addition of United Technologies will reinforce the new company’s presence in a number of those states, while adding Connecticut, Iowa, New York, and North Carolina (in other words, at least 20 states in all.)

Meanwhile, if the merger is approved, the future Raytheon Technologies will be greasing the wheels of its next arms contracts by relying on nearly four-dozen former government officials the two separate companies hired as lobbyists, executives, and board members in 2018 alone. Add to that the $6.4 million in campaign contributions and $20 million in lobbying expenses Raytheon clocked during the last two election cycles and the outlines of its growing influence begin to become clearer. Then, add as well the $2.9 million in campaign contributions and
$40 million in lobbying expenses racked up by its merger partner United Technologies and you have a lobbying powerhouse rivaled only by Lockheed Martin, the world’s largest defense conglomerate.

President Eisenhower’s proposed counterweight to the power of the military-industrial complex was to be “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry.” And there are signs that significant numbers of individuals and organizations are beginning to pay more attention to the machinations of the arms lobby. My own outfit, the Center for International Policy, has launched a Sustainable Defense Task Force composed of former military officers and Pentagon officials, White House and Congressional budget experts, and research staffers from progressive and good-government groups. It has already crafted a plan that would cut $1.2 trillion from the Pentagon budget over the next decade, while improving U.S. security by avoiding unnecessary wars, eliminating waste, and scaling back a Pentagon nuclear-weapons buildup slated to cost $1.5 trillion or more over the next three decades.

The Poor People’s Campaign, backed by research conducted by the National Priorities Project of the Institute for Policy Studies, is calling for a one-year $350 billion cut in Pentagon expenditures. And a new network called “Put People Over the Pentagon” has brought together more than 20 progressive organizations to press presidential candidates to cut $200 billion annually from the Department of Defense’s bloated budget. Participants in the network include Public Citizen, Moveon.org, Indivisible, Win Without War, 350.org, Friends of the Earth, and United We Dream, many of them organizations that had not, in past years, made reducing the Pentagon budget a priority.

Raytheon and its arms industry allies won’t sit still in the face of such proposals, but at least the days of unquestioned and unchallenged corporate greed in the ever-merging (but also ever-expanding) arms industry may be coming to an end. The United States has paid an exorbitantly high price in blood and treasure (as have countries like Afghanistan and Iraq) for letting the military-industrial complex steer the American ship of state through this century so far. It’s long past time for a reckoning.

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—CounterPunch, July 18, 2019

https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/07/18/merger-mania-the-military-industrial-complex-on-steroids/
In a bipartisan deal that one antiwar critic said demonstrates how thoroughly “broken and captured Washington is by the Pentagon,” 219 House Democrats and 65 Republicans on Thursday voted to approve a budget agreement that includes $1.48 trillion in military spending over the next two years.

Just 16 Democrats—including Representatives Ilhan Omar (Democrat-Minnesota) and Ayanna Pressley (Democrat-Massachusetts)—voted against the two-year, $2.7 trillion budget agreement. Largely due to expressed concerns about the deficit, 132 Republicans and Representative Justin Amash (Independent-Michigan) also voted no.

The final vote was 284-149. (See the full roll call.)

The House passage of the budget deal, which President Donald Trump quickly applauded on Twitter as a victory for the military, comes after the Congressional Progressive Caucus threatened in April to tank the measure in opposition to its out-of-control Pentagon outlays.

But most of the Progressive Caucus voted for the agreement on Thursday, pointing to increases in domestic spending.

“So, for the love of god, can we all stop pretending like this is somehow anything other than a continued orgy of unprecedented, wasteful, and obscene spending at the Pentagon.”

“It’s not a perfect deal by any means,” Representatives Pramila Jayapal (Democrat-Washington) and Mark Pocan (Democrat-Wisconsin), co-chairs of the Progressive Caucus, said in a statement ahead of the vote. “This deal does not address the bloated Pentagon budget, but it does begin to close the gap in funding for families, by allocating more new non-defense spending than defense spending for the first time in many years.”

Stephen Miles, executive director of Win Without War, took issue with the latter claim in a series of tweets Thursday.

“You’re no doubt hearing a lot of crowing from Democrats about how the deal they struck with Trump gives more money to ‘non-defense’ spending than to ‘defense,’” Miles wrote. “Let’s be clear that by every measure, save the one they’re using, that’s simply not true.”

“Under this deal, the Pentagon and its affiliated programs will get $1.48 trillion over the next two years. The entire rest of government, including the Veterans Administration by the way, will get $1.30 trillion. That’s $178.6 billion more for the Pentagon than the whole rest of government,” Miles wrote. “So, for the love of god, can we all stop pretending like this is somehow anything other than a continued orgy of unprecedented, wasteful, and obscene spending at the Pentagon.”

William Hartung, director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, wrote for Forbes this week that the budget deal “vastly overpays for the Pentagon.”

“At $738 billion for Fiscal-Year 2020 and $740 billion for Fiscal-Year 2021,” wrote Hartung, “the agreement sets the table for two of the highest budgets for the Pentagon and related work on nuclear warheads at the Department of Energy since World War II.”

“The proposed figures are higher than spending at the height of the Vietnam and Korean Wars, and substantially more than the high point of the Reagan buildup of the 1980s,” Hartung added. “And the Fiscal Year 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021 numbers are only slightly less than spending in 2010, when the United States had 180,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, rough-
ly nine times the number currently deployed.”

The sweeping 2020 budget agreement is expected to pass the Senate next week, and Trump has signaled he will sign the measure.2

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (Republican-Kentucky) joined the president in celebrating the increase in military spending, which is significantly more than the Pentagon requested.

The deal, McConnell said, “achieves the Number-one goal of the Republican side of the aisle, providing for the common defense.”

As Common Dreams reported on Tuesday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Democrat-California) came under fire from progressives for striking the budget agreement with Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin. Specifically, critics highlighted the deal to suspend the debt ceiling until 2021, a move that could give Republicans power to cripple the next president’s agenda.

“If you really listen,” wrote Splinter’s Paul Blest, “you can almost hear [Texas Senator] Ted Cruz yelling on the floor of the Senate that Congress shouldn’t raise the debt limit by one more dollar unless President Bernie Sanders promises to drop his demand for Medicare for All.”

—Common Dreams, July 26, 2019

Freedom and Slavery: The Birth of Capital
BY JOSH HOLROYD

Of all the catchwords used by capital’s paid and unpaid defenders, “freedom” is surely the most used and the least understood. “Capitalism is freedom” according to Turning Point, UK. Milton Freedman’s Capitalism and Freedom remains a holy text for those faithful to the church of Free Enterprise. In fact, it is impossible even to begin a discussion on the nature of capitalism without hearing, “individual freedom,” “free choice,” “free trade” or “free markets.”

The more individuals are left to trade and enrich themselves, the more capitalism thrives and consequently, the more free and prosperous everyone in society becomes—this argument is simple, familiar, and completely false. In reality, capitalist freedom has always had a deeply contradictory nature from the very beginning.

What the birth of capital required was that the owners of money, land and industry should be confronted by a mass of “free” workers, liberated from any property of their own and completely reliant on the market. This is the real foundation of the capitalist system, and its history is “written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire,” in the words of Karl Marx.

The decline of feudalism
It was amongst the crumbling ruins of feudal Europe that the foundations for a new social order were laid. But the first blows against the old order were struck neither by the merchants nor the money lenders, but by the poorest and most oppressed layer in feudal Europe: the serfs.

Medieval Europe was built on the unpaid labor of this class of semi-slaves, who were granted a small patch of land in return for which they were forced to work for free on the estates of the church and feudal nobility for several days a week. Added to this was “boon work” or corvee, which required the serfs to perform specific tasks for the benefit of their lords. In England at the time of the Domesday Book (1086), it is estimated that as much as 70 percent of the population were classed as serfs. It is in the struggle of this oppressed class of peasants to free themselves from bondage that the pre-history of capitalism can be traced.

There is an old German saying, “Stadtluft macht frei,” which means “town air makes you free.” Its source is a customary law from the Middle Ages under which any escaped serfs who remained in a town for a year and a day would no longer be subject to the claims of their former lords and hence would become free. But this custom did not simply descend from heaven or come about by a gentlemen’s agreement between the rulers and their slaves. It was the product of years of bitter class struggle.

A serf was considered a part of the lord’s property, as if he and his family had grown out of the soil itself. He was consequently completely under the jurisdiction of his lord, meaning he had little opportunity to seek justice from anyone else. The king was himself just another landlord and the church was the biggest landlord of all.

The easiest and most effective defense against the lords’ exploitation was flight, and throughout the Medieval period a constant struggle thundered between serfs striving to escape the snatching grasp of the lords and their man hunters who roved the country in search of their lost property.

One result of this clash was many of the free towns of Europe. These ramshackle settlements, from such humble beginnings, would in some cases become powerful independent cities.

1 http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2019/roll511.xml
2 “President Signs Budget Caps Bill,” August 9, 2019
“President Donald Trump has signed H.R. 3877, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019, into law after the bill passed the House July 25 and the Senate August 1, 2019.”
Born out of feudalism and yet in opposition to it, the town dwellers, known in France as "bourgeois," organized themselves into city councils and guilds, which served as local organs of power through which these collection of individuals, thrown together by common struggle, would be transformed into a class.

The growth of these towns and the rapid rise in population up to the Black Death contributed to a powerful upturn in trade, which began gradually to undermine the foundations of feudalism.

Engels remarks that "long before the ramparts of the baronial castles were breached by the new artillery, they had already been undermined by money" in his article, "The Decline of Feudalism and the Rise of the Bourgeoisie." As early as the Crusades, some lords were beginning to demand money rents from their subjects in place of labor services, so that they could access the various luxuries and exotic products this trade brought into view.

But the more the lords exacted money rents from their tenants, the more both parties became dependent on the towns. Previously, the feudal manor had been a self-sufficient unit, combining both handicrafts and agriculture. The growth of the towns brought with it more specialized products such as tools and cloth for the masses as well as silks for the nobility. From this growing division of labor sprang a new relationship between the rural peasants and the bourgeois in the towns—a relationship mediated through commodities.

The 14th century represents a point of no return in the struggle against serfdom, which was already in decline in most of Europe. Rather than strengthening the lords against the peasantry, the crisis caused by the Black Death—which reduced the population of Europe by at least a third—actually gave the peasants themselves a great deal of bargaining power. The response of the lords was to try to impose a legal maximum on the wages of laborers and to crush the peasantry with taxation, of which the Poll Tax was the most infamous example.

"Merchant’s capital, when it holds a position of dominance, stands everywhere for a system of robbery, so that its development among the trading nations of old and modern times is always directly connected with plundering, piracy, kidnapping slaves, and colonial conquest."

The result was the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381 which, allied with the poorest layer of the London masses, took the form of a national uprising. Despite its brutal suppression this revolutionary movement succeed on two fronts: there was no further levying of the Poll Tax (until Thatcher’s ill-fated attempt to resurrect it,) and serfdom in England was dead. In its place was an exhausted nobility, increasingly dependent on money rent, independent smallholding peasants and a growing bourgeoisie in the towns.

Engels remarks that in history the actions of the men and women who make history “ultimately have consequences quite other than those intended.” The struggle of the peasants and town dwellers had set the stage for a dramatic new act in world history, but no sooner had their freedom been won, so began a new wave of enslavement out of the fruits of their victory.

The world market

The decline of feudalism gave a powerful spur to the production and exchange of commodities. The developing division of labor between the craft industry in the towns and rural agriculture created an expanding demand for goods of all kinds. And this demand was fed by an increasingly complex and powerful web of commercial routes across Europe and the Mediterranean.

First in Egypt, then taken up by the Italian city-states, sophisticated legal instruments such as insurance contracts and trading companies were introduced to cover the risks associated with regular long-distance trade. And along with the growing power of the merchants came the rise of “that common whore of mankind:” money. The founding of merchant banks in the great trading cities of Italy, such as Venice, originally as a response to the needs of merchant “capital” would then act on this development, pushing it to greater heights.

By the 15th century the burgeoning commodity economy in Europe was straining against what appeared to be a natural limit. The production and exchange of greater and greater masses of commodities created a dire need for money as a means of circulation and payment. Further, producers of much sought-after luxuries in Asia would often only take payment in silver, having no need for European cloth.

The growing thirst for precious metals to feed the developing market could not be quenched by the relatively scanty produce of European mines. The result was the infamous “gold lust” that drove European adventurers on a quest of global pillage we now call the “Age of Discovery.”

One particularly quaint myth associated with this period is that it came about as a result of some uniquely European spirit of enquiry and adventure. This would certainly come as a
surprise to the Chinese and Arab explorers of the period. But Engels offers us the swiftest rebuttal of this romantic nonsense:

“It was gold that the Portuguese sought on the African coast, in India and the whole Far East; gold was the magic word which lured the Spaniards over the ocean to America.”

This fact was not lost on the native “savages” who encountered our intrepid European adventurers, one of whom remarked of Cortes’ conquistadors in Mexico:

“They lifted up the gold as if they were monkeys, with expressions of joy, as if it put new life into them and lit up their hearts.... They crave gold like hungry swine.” (quoted in Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent)

Everywhere the Europeans landed they discovered new wealth to bring home to sell at an enormous profit. Like old Midas, whatever they touched turned to gold, with calamitous results for the native peoples they encountered. Marx remarks (in Capital, vol. 3) that, “Merchant’s capital, when it holds a position of dominance, stands everywhere for a system of robbery, so that its development among the trading nations of old and modern times is always directly connected with plundering, piracy, kidnapping slaves, and colonial conquest.” Nowhere can this be more clearly seen than in the period following the discovery of the New World.

On August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed out of the Spanish port of Palos. His goal was to reach Asia by sailing west over the Atlantic. Instead, on October 12 he stumbled upon the Bahamas and a people called, in their own language, the Lukku- Cairei. In his diary, Columbus wrote:

“They go as naked as when their mothers bore them, and so do the women, although I did not see more than one girl. They are very well made, with very handsome bodies, and very good countenances.”

Historians estimate there were one million Tainos (of which the Lukku-Cairei were part) in 1492. Fifty-six years later there were only 500.

This became a model for the colonization of the rest of the Americas. Wiped out by unfamiliar diseases (sometimes deliberately), sent to an early death in poisonous mines, almost 100 million human beings were sacrificed at the altar of Commerce. The price of their lives was the 100,000 metric tons of silver exported to Europe from Latin America between 1492 and 1800.

By the end of the slave trade in 1853 between 12 and 15 million Africans had been transported, of whom as many as 2.4 million died on route.

Then as now, defenders of this genocide pointed to the benefits of European freedom that were being forcibly administered to the natives. One such pious servant of God, Archbishop Liñán y Cisneros explained:

“The truth is that they are hiding out to avoid paying tribute, abusing the liberty which they enjoy and which they never had under the Incas.” (quoted in Galeano, ibid.)

But these European liberators didn’t just free the indigenous population of their lives and treasure; each site of human sacrifice became a fresh link in the chain of the growing world market, demanding an intensification of production by the most barbaric means. As the native population of the Caribbean dwindled, it was replaced by African slaves and sugar plantations first trialed by the Portuguese on Cape Verde.

Rather than developing production on a higher level, the original achievement of the world market was to extend and intensify the slavery of old on an ever-expanding scale. By the end of the slave trade in 1853 between 12 and 15 million Africans had been transported, of whom as many as 2.4 million died on route.

This horrific slaughter was an integral part of the early development of capitalism. This was not lost on Marx, who emphasized (in Capital vol. 1):

“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production.”

And yet, this period confronts us in one respect as an immense contradiction. On the one hand we see a developing world market with the ever-expanding production and exchange of commodities; but on the other, the methods used to produce these commodities remain nothing more than the intensification of pre-existing forms of exploitation to an agonizing pitch.

Capitalism without commodities or money is unimaginable, but these still do not equate to capitalist production. What is required is for labor-power, the ability of human beings to work, to itself become a commodity. This final, decisive, stage in the birth of the capitalist system took the form of an immense social revolution, which began in England in the 16th century.

The agrarian revolution

In 1516, the famous Tudor lawyer and writer Thomas More observed:

“Yea and certyn Abbottes, holy men no doubt...leave no ground for tillers, thei enclose al into pastures: they throw downe houses: they
pluck downe townes and leave nothing standynge but only the church to be made a sheephowse…” (quoted in Morton, A People’s History of England)

What he was describing was a revolution, waged by the rich against their own people.

The end of serfdom had dealt a heavy blow to the power of the lords, but they still retained ownership of great swathes of land. It was from this position that the old masters began their counter-offensive against the free peasants of England.

The expansion of trade in the 14th century had also created a growing demand for wool, of which England was a major exporter. In response to this demand, landlords began forcibly evicting their feudal tenants in order to convert entire villages into sheepwalks. The importance of this lucrative trade for the English nobility can even be seen today in the woolsack upon which the Lord Speaker still sits in the House of Lords.

The result of this barefaced robbery was on the dispossession of thousands of peasants, many of whom had no choice but to roam the land looking for work or charity. The problem had already become so widespread that in 1489 Henry VII passed the first of a series of Acts, which sought to curtail the depopulation of the countryside.

The discovery of the Americas and the gigantic upswing in trade that came with it only added fuel to the fire. Throughout the Tudor period, agricultural production was shifted towards cash crops for the market, with a new breed of capitalist farmers employing landless paupers as laborers.

Even this new mode of production proved insufficient to soak up the flood of poverty, however. Eventually, the class of pauperized “vagabonds” became so large that it caused Queen Elizabeth I to introduce a special “Poor Rate” as early as 1601 whilst at the same time providing for “unlicensed beggars” to be executed “without mercy” as felons.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the expropriation and displacement of the rural masses took on an official form through the passing of a series of Enclosure Acts in Parliament. This was catastrophic for the rural population—it had effectively driven the English peasantry to extinction by the 19th century—but it provided an enormous army of propertyless laborers for the growing industries in and around the towns. It was this process of legalized theft that gave birth to the capitalist “property rights” so admired by modern defenders of capitalism.

The state

Another myth that surrounds the birth of capitalism is that it was achieved by the pioneering economic activity of enterprising individuals, in opposition to the dead hand of the state. This fairy tale is regularly dusted off whenever the modern state is forced to pass reforms by the pressure of the workers, but nothing could be further from the truth. At all points our future captains of industry and commerce depended on the most brutal state repression to protect their class interests.

Absolutism arose out of the contradictions of dying feudal society: a feudal monarchy resting alternately on landowners, bourgeois and peasantry. With one hand it placed checks on the expropriation of the peasantry but with another, usually acting in its own interests, actually hastened the development of capitalism.

The sale of lands expropriated from the Church after the Reformation at cut down prices, for example, was an enormous gift to the nascent capitalist farmers of the 16th century. Likewise, the establishment of colonial monopolies by all the absolutist monarchies of Western Europe, provided essential protection for the early development of manufacture.

However, precisely because of its transitional and contradictory nature, at a certain point this form of the state comes into a stark conflict with the interests of the bourgeoisie. Once the bourgeois had seized economic dominance, it must be able to rule in its own interests. And so the last vestige of the feudal political system became just another fetter on the great drive for accumulation, which was taking root.

Beginning with the Dutch War of Independence a wave of revolutions
swept Europe as the bourgeoisie took the road to political power. In its struggle against the old order, it united all that was healthy and progressive in society behind its call for “liberty.” Sweeping away the particularism of the past, the revolutionaries cleared the way for the development of a truly national market. In place of the arbitrary privileges of absolutism, they demanded the “rule of law,” which in practice has always meant the rule of the bourgeoisie.

But the great and tragic contradiction of all these movements lay in the fact that, as in the English Revolution, they ultimately delivered power not to the peasants and artisans who formed the iron sides of the revolutionary armies, but a new, even more powerful class of exploiters—something our modern lovers of liberty tend to forget.

Following the burial of absolutism the state came fully into the possession of the new landed aristocracy, “bankocracy” and large manufacturers, either in the form of a republic or, more commonly a “constitutional” (that is, tame) monarchy.

Anyone who doubts the significance of this for the development of capitalism need only look at the measures taken by the English Parliament after the so-called Glorious Revolution in 1688: Enclosures were transformed from a widespread abuse to a deliberate policy; the Bank of England was created along with the “National Debt”—a debt to none other than capitalist speculators; further legislation to impose a “maximum wage” was imposed, while combinations of workers to negotiate better pay and conditions were, of course, forbidden.

The concentrated power of the state was used “to hasten, hot-house fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition,” Marx writes in Capital (vol. 1), adding, “Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.”

It might also be noted that in this Golden Age of Liberty and Enlightenment, not a single worker or poor peasant had either a vote or political representation in any form. In reality the rising capitalist landowners and manufacturers needed the power of the state to “regulate” wages and lengthen the working day.

Wiped out by unfamiliar diseases (sometimes deliberately,) sent to an early death in poisonous mines, almost 100 million human beings were sacrificed at the altar of Commerce. The price of their lives was the 100,000 metric tons of silver exported to Europe from Latin America between 1492 and 1800.

In fact, it is only when their own miniature tyranny in the workplace is secured that the capitalist class will tolerate any political freedoms on the part of the workers, and even then, these are to be limited so as not to infringe upon their sacred right to “private property,” that is, the fruit of centuries of theft.

The birth of the working class

The development of society is in the last instance determined by the development of humanity’s productive forces. But on its own technology is incapable of changing society—it is itself socially determined. The ancient Greeks had discovered steam power long before bourgeois Europe. Even the German inventor, Anton Müller produced a loom capable of weaving several pieces of cloth at the same time as early as 1529. The result was not the industrial revolution but, on the contrary, the murder of the inventor by the local city council.

In England, the agrarian and political revolutions of the 16th and 17th centuries laid the basis for the industrial revolution. Without the creation of a “surplus” population of proletarians, the rising productivity of agriculture, and the gigantic boons granted to the capitalists by their conquest of political power, such an enormous social transformation would have been unthinkable.

The newly created proletariat was quickly put to work, usually under the whip of brutal repression, but one more obstacle to the unfettered freedom of capitalist exploitation remained: the guilds. By imposing strict rules and restrictions on the industry the guild system, which was itself a product of the struggle of the early bourgeoisie, became a suffocating fetter on the free development of the capitalist mode of production. In fact, the first manufacture of woolen cloth recorded in 16th century was shut down by the local guilds precisely because it threatened their monopoly.

The first cotton-spinning mill was actually set up outside of any major town, in Royton, Lancashire, in order to avoid the resistance of what remained of the guilds in 1764. This quickly established a pattern for what would become the factory system. As one writer noted in 1773:

“Working-men are driven from their cottages and forced into the towns to seek for employment; but then a larger surplus is obtained and thus capital is augmented.” (J Arbuthnot, quoted in Marx, Capital, vol. 1)

Here lies the secret of capital: Not private enterprise but the sweated labor of others; not property rights but the absence of property for the many.
Eventually, the wage limitations, which had been in place for centuries, were finally repealed in 1813. They were now “an absurd anomaly” according to Marx, as the capitalists could freely dictate their workers’ wages and conditions as they pleased. The advance of capitalist production (helped by the mailed fist of the state) had finally developed “a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws.”

As this newer, more “civilized,” form of exploitation took over more and more spheres of production, the British ruling class suddenly discovered that the slaves working its colonial plantations were human beings too. But when it finally abolished slavery in its colonies in 1833, the British government paid out £20 million to compensate not the slaves but the 3,000 families that had owned slaves for their loss of “property.” This figure represented today’s terms around £16.5 billion: an enormous gift to the slave-owners, which they promptly put to use in English factories, Irish farms and Indian plantations.

Slavery was not abolished because it was immoral; it was abolished because it was unprofitable. It would be foolish to persist in such an expensive and unproductive enterprise when a shrewd investor could squeeze a never-before-seen profit from the blood of the “free-born slaves” of Britain and its colonies.

But the creation of the working class gave a double gift to the capitalists. Not only did it create their profits from the workers’ surplus labor; it also created the means by which those profits could be realized—the first ever truly mass consumer market.

The average peasant never tended to buy much food or clothing because he would grind his own corn and weave his own cloth. The dispossession of the peasantry meant that not only were they dependent on the capitalists for work and wages, they also had to spend those wages on basic necessities like food and clothing from none other than the same capitalists (looked at on a national scale).

Later, in the 19th century, the British state used tariffs to destroy the Indian home-spinning industry and flood the market with cloth, often spun from Indian cotton. The role of India as a colony thus shifted from solely being a source of loot (which it remained) to also being an enormous captive market. In this way, the Indian masses, like their British counterparts, paid twice for their exploitation by the British capitalists.

This played an important role both in the rise of British capitalism and the struggle for Indian independence. In 1921, the Indian National Congress adopted a flag containing a picture of a spinning wheel to symbolize the home industry destroyed by British-rigged competition. This spinning wheel still survives (in part) in the Indian flag today, although it was changed into a Buddhist chakra wheel.

The importance of mass consumption to capitalism can be seen today on an even grander scale. The effect of this in our culture is the rampant consumerism and debt which bears down on us as individuals like a force of nature. We must not only work; we must buy. In this sense, supply determines demand as much as demand determines supply.

A new fight

Capital now emerged, fully formed and “dripping blood from every pore” (to use Marx’s expression). Ever since, the freedom of capital has continued to find its reflection and source in the unfreedom of human beings. But it has also laid the basis for a new and greater fight.

Just as the bourgeoisie, a class born of the struggle between the feudal lords and serfs, was eventually able to seize power, transform the state to its own ends and wield it to eliminate the old order, so too can the working class, itself created by capitalism’s infinite drive to exploit human labor-power.

Like the medieval serfs, the workers of today give up most of their lives for a parasitic class of property owners. But by taking the immense productive forces created by their own labor into the hands of society as a whole, the workers of the world can put an end to class oppression for good, and usher in a new era of genuine freedom for the whole of the human race.

—Socialist Appeal, June 21, 2019


1 “...a manuscript record of the ‘Great Survey’ of much of England and parts of Wales completed in 1086 by order of King William the Conqueror.”


2 “The Black Death, also known as the Great Plague or the Plague, or less commonly the Black Plague, was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people in Eurasia and peaking in Europe from 1347 to 1351.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death
Heartbreaking images and videos of weeping children and loved ones spread rapidly on social media Wednesday night, August 7, 2019, after Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested nearly 700 workers at several Mississippi food processing plants in a series of coordinated raids that were described as “the largest single-state workplace enforcement action in U.S. history.”

Mississippi’s local WJTV reported following the ICE raids that “many children of those arrested across the state are now left homeless with nowhere to go.”

“These children,” WJTV reported, “were relying on neighbors and even strangers to pick them up outside their homes after school and drive them to a community fitness center where people tried to keep them calm. But many kids could not stop crying for mom and dad.”

Among those appearing on local television news cameras was 11-year-old Magdalena Gomez Gregorio, who pleaded that her father, among those missing after the raids, be returned to her.

“My dad is not a criminal,” Gregorio said through tears.

As ProPublica reporter Dara Lind pointed out on Twitter, young children of immigrants have lived in constant fear of their parents being swept up at any moment by President Donald Trump’s deportation force.

“I’ve spoken to school employees in cities where there were no raids,” noted Lind, “saying that sometimes kids came in midday asking to call and see if parents were still home.”

In total, ICE agents carried out raids in six Mississippi cities, leaving outrage and despair in their wake. According to local news reports, workers suspected of being undocumented were rounded up, placed on buses, and sent to an ICE facility in Louisiana.

“Children finished their first day of school with no parents to go home to tonight,” reported the Jackson Free Press. “Babies and toddlers remained at daycare with no guardian to pick them up. A child vainly searched a workplace parking lot for missing parents.”

Buzzfeed reported the story of a woman named Dianne, whose fiancé was arrested in one of the raids on Wednesday.

On Wednesday morning, Dianne received an alarming call. It was her fiancé, dialing her from the chicken processing plant in a nearby central Mississippi town where he worked long shifts deboning meat.

“ICE is here!” he yelled. In the background, Dianne could hear other laborers terrified. The panic was palpable. One worker called out in Spanish, “Ayúdame! [Help me!]”

Dianne’s fiancé, who came to the country more than two decades ago from Mexico without authorization, told her he had no way out and would not be able to escape immigration enforcement agents. His voice trembling, he told Dianne that she needed to make a promise before he got off the line: “Take care of my kids.”

In a statement Wednesday, Jackson, Mississippi Mayor Chokwe Lumumba condemned the raids as “dehumanizing.”

“I’m calling upon faith institutions in our community to become sanctuaries for our immigrant neighbors and protect them from potential harm,” Lumumba said. “The City of Jackson strongly objects to the Trump administration’s ICE raids.”

Greisa Martínez Rosas, deputy executive director of rights group United We Dream, called the massive raids “an act of terrorism” against immigrant communities and said the “effect of ripping children from their parents at the border or stealing parents away from their children in Mississippi is the same.”

“Just days after the El Paso massacre where a gun wielding maniac parroted Trump’s anti-immigrant hate, a battalion of ICE agents abducted 680 Latinx and immigrant men and women on Trump’s orders,” tweeted Rosas. “For anyone who tries to desensitize the situation or blur the connections between the acts of terror this week I call bullshit. Latinx and immigrant kids and families have been terrorized this week.”

“It is time for both parties in Congress to stop giving ICE and [Customs and Border Protection] billions of dollars and to hold them accountable,” Rosas said. “ICE and CBP are the armed, taxpayer funded extension of Trump’s anti-immigrant hate and must be stopped.”

—Common Dreams, August 8, 2019

On August 7, 2019, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents carried out coordinated raids at seven agricultural processing plants in Mississippi, detaining 680 immigrant workers. Officials told The Washington Post that the operation was “the largest single-state workplace enforcement action in U.S. history.”

The massive operation generated terror in immigrant communities already traumatized by a massacre targeting people of Mexican origin in El Paso, Texas, days earlier, and much of the U.S.-born population was outraged by images of detained workers’ sobbing children.

As has happened after workplace raids in the past, news accounts noted that the employers remained free while their workers were led off to migrant jails in handcuffs. Politicians and social media users quickly responded by calling for the arrest of the company owners who hired the undocumented workers; many people remarked on President Trump’s record of using unauthorized labor in his own businesses. No doubt the people who want bosses imprisoned have good intentions, but they’re missing the point. More arrests won’t help either immigrant or U.S.-born workers. What working people really need is an end to the raids, a repeal of the laws and policies that make the raids possible, and a rejection of the assumptions on which these laws and policies are based.

The “employer sanctions” myth

Workplace raids have a long history in the United States, but the current practice gets its justification from the so-called “employer sanctions” in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, a requirement for companies to verify the immigration status of new hires and pay fines if they fail to do so. The rationale for the measure was a claim that it would discourage undocumented immigrants from seeking work here. Proponents said this would benefit U.S.-born workers by limiting competition from low-wage foreigners.

The idea that employer sanctions would reduce unauthorized immigration got a real-life test over the next two decades: the undocumented population tripled, from four million to more than 12 million. (The undocumented population has since declined to about 10.5 million.)

What working people really need is an end to the raids, a repeal of the laws and policies that make the raids possible, and a rejection of the assumptions on which these laws and policies are based.

This should have been enough to convince policy makers that restrictions on legal employment in the United States wouldn’t be enough to offset the push factors—such as the North American Free Trade Agreement—that might lead workers to move here from nearby countries. The AFL-CIO got the message: The labor federation originally supported employer sanctions, but in 2000, it called for their elimination.

In contrast, the U.S. political class responded to the sanctions’ failure by doubling down. In the late 1990s, politicians and the media began hyping E-Verify, a program that seeks to enforce the sanctions by having employers check new hires’ documents against an online government database. But E-Verify, too, has been a resounding failure. It is fairly easy to circumvent, and its main achievement seems to be in pushing more undocumented immigrants into the underground economy, where they face lower wages and fewer labor protections.

“We will be hunted”

If employer sanctions don’t stop undocumented immigrants from settling in the U.S., what do they accomplish?

Back in 1986, immigrant workers correctly predicted the effect the measure would have. “[W]e will be hunted,” a Mexican man told The New York Times as he waited to cross the border into California. “The employers who are willing to hire us will take advantage of us. They will threaten to turn us in. They will want to pay us less because they will say they are taking a risk to give us jobs.”

Employers used threats of deportation to keep undocumented workers in line before 1986, but the new law gave bosses even greater leverage. Academic studies indicate that undocumented workers make significantly less than documented workers with similar qualifications—between six percent and 20 percent—and there’s evidence that the current “wage penalty” for being undocumented is largely a consequence of employer sanctions.

By depressing wages for undocumented workers, the sanctions also depress wages for U.S.-born workers seeking jobs in the same fields—a result exactly opposite to the one the law was supposed to produce. Moreover, workplace raids play an important role in this process of keeping wages down and profits up.

In 2000, an immigration official admitted that the authorities rarely
detained undocumented workers “unless the employer turns a worker in, and employers usually do that only to break a union or prevent a strike or that kind of stuff.” Immigration officials are more circumspect now, but there are indications that “that kind of stuff” may still be triggering workplace actions.

One of the plants raided on August 7 was a Morton, Mississippi, facility owned by Illinois-based poultry giant Koch Foods Inc. In 2018, Koch Foods had to pay $3.75 million to settle an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission suit over racial and sexual harassment of Latina workers there.

Unlike many food-processing plants, the one in Morton has a union, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), which also represents workers at another Koch plant swept up in the raids. (The company has no connection to Charles and David Koch’s Koch Industries.)

“Ending the climate of fear”

This isn’t the first time ICE has focused on plants where the workers have joined unions and fought for better conditions. In June 2018, agents raided a Fresh Mark facility in Salem, Ohio, where the workers are represented by the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union; the action came a week after the Occupational Safety and Health Administration fined Fresh Mark $211,194 for allowing hazardous work conditions. The current raids follow a pattern from the George W. Bush administration, when plants with union representation or with unionization drives seemed to be favorite targets for workplace operations.

While it’s true that individual companies may have their businesses disrupted by raids, ICE’s operations benefit employers as a whole. Dramatic workplace roundups help create the situation that UFCW spokesperson Abraham White described after the Mississippi sweeps: “Workers across this country are too scared to stand up for their rights and to report wage theft, dangerous work conditions, and other workplace issues.” White called for “ending this dangerous climate of fear.”

Demands to arrest bosses for hiring immigrants without the proper papers will do nothing to combat the fear—especially in the context of union-busting workplace raids. The way working people can overcome fear and win better wages and conditions is, as it’s always been, by organizing and by firmly resisting the political class’s efforts to create divisions through appeals to racism and xenophobia.


—Truthout, August 23, 2019

https://truthout.org/articles/ice-raids-benefit-bosses-by-creating-fear-in-workers/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=b14fa509-0890-4131-832e-e62fede43841
We Need More Leninism, Not Less

By Juan Cruz Ferre

The sudden and rapid demise of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has sparked a debate about party building, internal democracy and the kind of organization that socialists need in the fight against capitalism.

The dissolution of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has taken place in the context of a socialist revival and a new wave of labor unrest. At the same time the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) has emerged as a reformist Left of national significance. A renewed left wing of the Democratic Party elbows its way into Congress, generating illusions of lasting transformations. Meanwhile, the downfall of the once-largest Trotskyist organization in the United States, together with the alignment of most of the left behind Bernie Sanders campaign for 2020, has left thousands of radicals without a political home. The situation is even more pressing given the rise of the far left in Europe and the United States.

Why did the ISO collapse? A neo-Kautskian current blames Leninism for all the evils that afflicted the ISO and uses this narrative to lay down a policy of capitulation to the Democratic Party. But behind the debate around what kind of organization we need lies a debate on strategy. Most of the commentaries have revolved around organizational problems, the bureaucratic leadership and the ISO’s toxic internal dynamics. This is understandable: The cover-up of a rape case in 2013 by the ISO leadership warrants a deep reflection on organizational structure and accountability. But without a deeper analysis of the ISO’s politics and its connection with the organization’s trajectory, its sudden, unexpected collapse is left largely unexplained. The knee-jerk conclusion is that the project of building a disciplined revolutionary organization can lead only to failure and despair.

Leninist organizations, so the argument goes, are intrinsically prone, if not absolutely condemned, to degenerate into cult-like sects. Yet a critical assessment of the ISO’s demise cannot be drawn in a vacuum, detached from the politics that led to, or at least reinforced, a bureaucratic degeneration. In other words, the shallow criticism of the “form” leaves out the much richer discussion of the “content.”

...they coexisted with “progressives” in the leadership of unions, such as those in the Chicago teachers’ union...

Campus socialism

The ISO famously managed to thrive during the worst years of neoliberalism and working-class retreat. It did so following Tony Cliff’s recipe for building in the downturn, that is, focusing on propaganda and political agitation to win people over through ideas, and less so through common experience in class struggle. “If we don’t do this,” Cliff concluded, “then as the downturn continues we are going to find ourselves high and dry. The swamp will surround us and get bigger, so we have to build our little island to keep ourselves out of it.”

The successful campus-based recruitment strategy led the ISO to become, before the turn of the century, the largest socialist organization in the United States. The growth in numbers was accompanied by the success of Haymarket Books, a publishing house that the ISO leadership controlled through the Center for Economic Research and Social Change (CERC).

But as the organization’s membership approached (or passed) the 1,000 mark, the social composition of its ranks changed little. Heavily influenced by its Cliffite tradition, the ISO never made a concerted effort to gain a stronger foothold in organized labor. The leadership discouraged members from “salting,” and the organization as a whole neglected work in the unions. The ISO never attempted a plan to build a revolutionary current in the labor movement.

When ISOers did get involved, their approach was usually not based on a rank-and-file perspective, but a “strategy of permeation.” This may not be true of all ISO members, but it holds for the most prominent cases, the ones that matter the most since they are held as examples. They did not focus on building currents of revolutionary militants in the unions, putting all the organization’s weight behind every battle against the bosses and offering an uncompromising critique of the union bureaucracy. Instead, they coexisted with “progressives” in the leadership of unions, such as those in the Chicago teachers’ union (former ISO member and CTU President Jesse Sharkey being a case in point) or in UTLA (before the current caucus took over). Moreover, they either failed to criticize the union bureaucracy when it capitulated or they published confusing accounts when the union bureaucracy sold out. We need to be clear: This is not a mere difference in tactics. Class struggle is the main catalyst for consolidating a militant current in the labor movement, thereby opening the possibility for socialists to win over some of the most militant organizers to revolutionary ideas.
Despite some weaknesses, Hal Draper’s much-cited article, “Anatomy of the Micro-Sect” has the merit of stating clearly how the sect mentality and orientation lead an organization to try to build its ranks in isolation from workers’ struggles—Tony Cliff’s “little island.” The basic strategy of building a socialist movement, Draper contends, following Marx, “lies in fusing two movements—the class movement for this-or-that step which gets a decisive sector of the class into collision with the state and the bourgeoisie; and the work of permeating this class movement with educational propaganda for social revolution.”

But this fusion with the most advanced and militant workers (the workers’ vanguard, or the militant minority) will simply not happen if the organization is not engaging in workplace organizing and rank-and-file, class-struggle unionism. Embracing the framework of a historical “down-turn” in labor unrest meant for the ISO that it was not the time for advancing class-struggle organizations or militant unionism. But this is not the case. Revolutionaries take lessons from defeats as well as from victories. Correct understanding of the union bureaucracy’s role allows revolutionary organizations to anticipate their capitulation and to prepare for that moment. If there is enough groundwork with rank-and-file union members pushing for their demands, it is not hard to turn a betrayal into a key learning experience and to use the anger against the leadership as a springboard to launch (or strengthen, as the case may be) a left opposition in the union.

The ISO transformed its tactical orientation for building in the down-turn into an atemporal (unrelated to time) strategy. Sooner or later there would be a reckoning. The main responsibility for this flawed orientation lies with the leadership. As different accounts show, there were many attempts by rank and file and dissenting factions (like the Renewal Faction in 2014) to address problems in the organization—to no avail.

Most Marxists trace the origins of Lenin’s party model to his 1902 pamphlet “What Is to Be Done?” There, he argues precisely against the predominant role of middle-class intellectuals and makes a case for encouraging the emergence of “professional revolutionaries”—not in the sense of paid, full-time organizers but of individuals who dedicate their lives to revolutionary politics.

Class struggle is the main catalyst for consolidating a militant current in the labor movement, thereby opening the possibility for socialists to win over some of the most militant organizers to revolutionary ideas.

Drifting away
With all its flaws, the ISO remained for several decades a bulwark of Marxism in the U.S. political landscape. It typically refused to endorse Democratic Party candidates, denounced the two-party system and the bankruptcy of U.S. democracy and produced an important body of socialist literature, both theoretical and political. For this reason, the downfall of the ISO is bad news for the U.S. left. It means we no longer have the healthy left pressure of a several-hundred-strong organization of committed militants fighting for socialism.

There are hundreds of former ISO members who, after the ISO’s dissolution, remain intent on organizing for working-class, revolutionary politics. This makes it all the more important to draw the right lessons from the ISO’s demise. In this regard, some of the conclusions by former leaders are remarkably poor. In Todd Chretien’s account, for example, the ISO did the best it could in a period that was very hostile for the left. But if the ISO did everything right, then there is little that we can learn to make sure new attempts to build a revolutionary project do not end the same way.

If we scrutinize the ISO’s political record, however, we can find some reasons for the organization’s breakneck spiral into dissolution. Although maintaining a formally independent working-class politics, the ISO zigzagged in the terrain of electoral politics. After Barack Obama’s first victory in 2008, the cover of the International Socialist Review (ISR) featured a rising sun and a clenched fist with the title “Politics and Struggle in a New Era. Yes We Can!” The editorial was more moderate in its assessment of Obama’s politics, but it still encouraged illusions in Obama’s presidency.

The missteps around Obama’s election were not the only equivocation in the ISO’s electoral politics. The organization consistently supported the Green Party and ran candidates on its ballot believing that, even if the Greens are not a working-class party, the growth of a “third party” is in itself a step forward for socialists in the United States. The class line, then, became increasingly blurry.

We can find a similar diversion from “orthodox” Marxist politics when it came to international positions. It was reflected in the ISO’s support for the broad-left Greek party Syriza (inside which the ISO’s sister organization in Greece, DEA, organized) and its celebration of left-populist formation Podemos in Spain (although more critical in more recent articles.) Similarly, the uncritical reproduction of statements by Marea Socialista, a left split

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from the Chavista Socialist Unified Party of Venezuela (PSUV), which openly defends the legacy of Hugo Chávez, further contributed to the confusion about the role of socialists with regard to the capitalist state.

These positions are often justified as an attempt to advance socialist politics in dialogue with real social phenomena that are moving left. Furthermore, a principled opposition to these attempts to manage capitalism with a socialist or anti-austerity rhetoric is taken as a sectarian shortcoming that would prevent the growth of an organization. But this is not true. The Party of Socialist Workers (PTS) in Argentina, member of the Workers’ Left Front (FIT), arguably the most dynamic revolutionary left party in the world today, forged its membership in the heat of debates against currents that defended Latin America’s Pink Tide governments. Nevertheless, the PTS/FIT became a leading party on the left in Argentina.

All the ISO’s departures from revolutionary socialist principles inevitably had a tangible effect on the organization. The “red lines” of class politics became hard to find. Because the ISO did not intervene in the labor movement as a socialist, revolutionary current, its missteps and ambiguities in the field of electoral politics and on international issues further blurred an already fuzzy program. It became harder and harder to see the revolutionary project put forward by the ISO.

By the time the DSA rose as a mammoth organization of the U.S. left, the pressure to jump ship was too strong for many ISO members. After all, the ISO’s politics didn’t differ that much from the DSA’s left wing. Over the last two years, the ISO slowly lost many of its cadres to the DSA, including members of several years. Under tremendous pressure from an increasingly popular reformist left, the ISO leadership decided in 2018 to openly debate—in its paper, Socialist Worker—something that should be a given for any so-called revolutionary left organization: What position to take on the Democratic Party. Although the majority opposed endorsing Sanders as a Democratic Party candidate, the fact that the ISO had to openly discuss whether to support a bourgeois party’s candidate showed that the crisis was deep. After years of supporting the Green Party as an adequate first step toward an independent working-class party, the fact that ISO members began openly entertaining the idea of endorsing a Democrat represented a qualitative shift.

When a new leadership took over after the national convention this year and the mishandling of a rape accusation case in 2013 came to light, the centrifugal forces were already too strong. The bureaucratic methods that had kept the organization together in the past were now obsolete. The dam had broken.
Social movements

The ISO eagerly participated in social movements. As part of a trend in the international left to take part more wholeheartedly in these movements, and in the absence of a resolute intervention in labor, agitating for the rights of women, LGBTQ people and immigrants, and against racist police brutality, became the bread and butter of the ISO’s activism. The general approach, however, was typically not to open a debate inside these movements on politics and strategy, but rather to join them as they were, advance the demands that were natural to the movement and fight tooth and nail for them alongside other activists. The ISO’s reliance on building in the universities favored certain racial composition of its membership. Having a weak insertion in communities of color, it was difficult to intervene as active members of those movements and put forward an orientation.

While joining progressive social movements and fighting in them alongside other activists is a requisite for any organization that wants to have an impact on the real world, revolutionary militants do not shy away from political debates and anti-capitalist agitation. When social movements develop some structure and leadership, it is not unusual for the latter to advocate using institutional channels to achieve certain goals. A glaring example of this was the Women’s March, which was led and politically capitalized by Democratic Party politicians and supporters. Another example is the platform “Movement for Black Lives,” which emerged in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and tried to channel all their anger and disruptive power into policy proposals to be advanced through lobbying.

If socialists don’t challenge those emerging (or established) bureaucracies rising on the shoulders of real movements, they don’t forge the collective tools to debate with currents that are indifferent or hostile to socialism: liberal feminism, petty bourgeois Black nationalism and so on. Ignoring the differences or shying away from a political debate (usually for the sake of “unity” in the movement) is a lost opportunity at advancing revolutionary politics and forming a radical left current inside the movement. Furthermore, I would argue that the pressure of these movements—with their contradictions—made themselves feel inside the ISO. At the ISO’s last convention, members rightly addressed the burning problem of the organization’s racial and gender composition (a problem by no means exclusive to the ISO), but the main proposal to address it was to establish quotas for the leadership bodies. In other words, to a serious problem of organizing among the most oppressed, and training and enabling them to become political leaders, the response was a maladroit organizational fix.

Democratic or bureaucratic centralism?

Absent the prospects of building revolutionary currents in the labor movement, the ISO continued to focus on campus organizing, even when it had several hundred active members. As a consequence, the party apparatus acquired disproportionate weight. Saman S. and Adam T. point out that this setup enabled a certain “economics” of the organization, in which those comrades who were loyal to the party line were rewarded with articles in Socialist Worker or even book contracts with Haymarket. With an annual budget of several million dollars, Haymarket and the CERSC became the material base for a layer of full-timers in charge of key organizing activities and responsible for laying down the party line. Those who strayed out of line were pushed aside, ostracized or expelled.

Some people on the left, particularly social democrats campaigning for Sanders, were quick to celebrate ISO’s collapse—in a more or less veiled fashion—and ascribe its downfall to the flaws intrinsic to “Leninism.” Democratic centralism, they claim, inevitably leads to the concentration of power in a few hands. But a key aspect of democratic centralism is, precisely, internal democracy.

Most Marxists trace the origins of Lenin’s party model to his 1902 pamphlet “What Is to Be Done?” There, he argues precisely against the predominant role of middle-class intellectuals and makes a case for encouraging the emergence of “professional revolutionaries”—not in the sense of paid, full-time organizers but of individuals who dedicate their lives to revolutionary politics.

Lenin argued for a certain level of discipline and homogeneity in the ranks of the party in order for it to be an efficient revolutionary organization. In one sense, he advocated centralism as coordination. The “army” of revolutionaries, in other words, had to strike together in one blow when the situation demanded it. But this “central coordination”—without which workers’ struggles would be disconnected from each other and the action of socialist activists would never go beyond local issues—needs to be complemented with the most unrestricted, and sometimes heated, deliberation over orientation, strategy and tactics. Internal debates, faction fights and public polemics were the lifeblood of the Russian Social Democratic
Labor Party (RSLP) from which the Bolsheviks emerged as the leading faction. Even inside the Bolshevik Party, when it started to function as a de facto party around 1903, debates were not shut down but welcomed and encouraged. Lenin’s “April Theses” are probably the most remarkable example of how even the most respected leader among the Bolsheviks had to make his case for the party to adopt his orientation after a heated deliberation. And they were discussing nothing less than what position to take vis-a-vis the provisional government!

The level of “openness” and debate, as explained by Lenin in different writings, depended on the circumstances: When democratic rights allowed the party to organize legally and engage in a variety of public actions, the “democratic pole” would predominate. When circumstances pushed the party to go underground, a more centralized command was needed to keep the party from being dismantled by state repression. The same is true for specific moments that demanded expeditious action. In those situations, increased centralization was imposed by the class struggle and the repressive power of the capitalist state.

It needs to be emphasized that the model of a democratic-centralist organization allows for a much more democratic internal life than any other type of political party. Traditional social democratic parties have relied on a mass base that expresses its support through the polls but that has little influence over the party’s politics, which are determined by the leadership’s professional politicians. Similarly, broad left parties such as Syriza or Podemos have shown themselves to be especially prone to the concentration of power in the hands of charismatic leaders (Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias, respectively). They have, moreover, been incorporated surprisingly fast into the structures of power—most tragically in the case of Syriza, which has implemented austerity policies, privatized public goods and openly repressed protests.

**Party and strategy**

A common trope among anti-Leninists is that his revolutionary strategy is obsolete today. In advanced capitalist societies, they claim, bourgeois hegemony is exerted predominantly through consent. Democratic rights, liberal democracy and parliamentarism generate such support for the capitalist state that it is only by conquering the government through elections that a socialist force could have the legitimacy and, therefore, the popular support to effect a definite break with capitalism.

The missteps around Obama’s election were not the only equivocation in the ISO’s electoral politics. The organization consistently supported the Green Party and ran candidates on its ballot believing that, even if the Greens are not a working-class party, the growth of a “third party” is in itself a step forward for socialists in the United States. The class line, then, became increasingly blurry.

The historic record of peaceful attempts to achieve socialism through elections is nothing but a daunting enumeration of tragedy, defeat and betrayal. Faced with this overwhelming evidence, anti-Leninists are forced to admit that, at some point, there will need to be a rupture with the capitalist state, in order to defeat the inevitable capitalist boycott of the transformative process implemented by the socialist government. But this will come at a later moment, not now. Now we have to focus on winning elections.

Of course, the moment of rupture never comes. But by propounding this strategy, they can still claim they are fighting for socialism—and not just for the crumbs a capitalist state can afford here and there for the working class. This is the reason behind the attempts to recycle the theories of Karl Kautsky, a character who had been rightfully consigned to the dustbin of history. This position is best laid out today by the social democratic pole around Jacobin magazine and the DSA members behind the publication The Call.

As Nathaniel Flakin explains, Kautsky’s strategy of attrition proved a failure during the German revolution of 1918. His “grand strategy” of slowly eroding the capitalist system through elections and partial victories until the right time comes for a revolution amounted to plain reformism. When the revolutionary situation came in Germany in 1918 and in 1923, his party failed the test.

This is actually not surprising since, as Eric Blanc admits, Kautsky “avoided putting forward a rigid or detailed stance on how the transition to socialism should proceed.” If the party he was leading (the German Social Democratic Party) capitulated to nationalist pressures in the lead-up to WW I, collaborated with the Freikorps to murder Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, and finally proved incompetent at fighting fascism…what is it that Kautsky really has to offer?

The real answer is this: a classy name for the same old reformism. Even worse, activists around Jacobin have found in Kautsky’s theories the perfect justification for orienting the DSA toward working inside the
Democratic Party—a road that many generations of socialists have known to be a dead end. They share this agenda with the DSA’s old guard, which has historically favored a strategy of pushing the Democratic Party to the left.

A party for the revolution

There is a reason why Kautsky’s insistence on accumulating forces in parliament left the German party ill prepared for the revolutionary situation that opened in 1918. A party can’t switch from electoralism to revolutionary struggle overnight. If a party’s “center of gravity” is on winning elections, as Emilio Albamonte, and Matías Maiello (co-authors of the book, Socialist Strategy and Military Art, 2017) explain, its ability to engage in extra-parliamentary action is blunted. It becomes impossible to achieve the concentration of forces necessary to lead the decisive battle for power, which will necessarily involve an open confrontation with the capitalist state when the time comes.

For those who have hopes in a gradual transition to socialism, it makes sense to build a relatively loose organization that focuses on “base building,” leading campaigns for reforms here and there, and guided by the overarching goal of accumulating forces in Congress. But for those of us who understand the need for a revolutionary break with the capitalist order, such a political tool will always prove inadequate.

A party of combat that fights all kinds of oppression and helps prepare the ground for the decisive battle requires us to focus on fostering workers’ self-organization, engage in class-struggle unionism in opposition to the union bureaucracy and, most importantly, advance an independent, working-class program. These tasks need to be at the center of our political activity today.

For these reasons, Draper’s model falls short of the strategic cohesiveness needed to build a common political project and, as Brian Bean (contributing writer for SocialistWorker.org) points out, it has failed the test of time.

In this scenario, where a revived left is experiencing rapid growth and where a new generation of socialists is debating the hard questions of working-class independence, internationalism and the strategy to take power, a strong revolutionary left is more necessary than ever. The path propounded by Kautsky and his followers leads to co-optation and defeat. We need more Leninism, not less.

—Left Voice, May 4, 2019
https://www.leftvoice.org/we-need-more-leninism-not-less

1 Karl Johann Kautsky October 16, 1854-October 17, 1938) was a Czech-Austrian philosopher, journalist, and Marxist theoretician. Kautsky was recognized as among the most authoritative promulgators of Orthodox Marxism after the death of Friedrich Engels in 1895 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Following the war, Kautsky was an outspoken critic of the Bolshevik Revolution, engaging in polemics with Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin on the nature of the Soviet state. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Kautsky

2 Tony Cliff (born Yigael Gluckstein), May 20, 1917-April 9, 2000, was a Trotskyist activist. Born to a Jewish family in what is now Israel, he moved to Britain in 1947 and by the end of the 1950s had assumed the pen name of Tony Cliff. A founding member of the Socialist Review Group, which became the International Socialists and then the Socialist Workers Party, in 1977, Cliff was effectively the leader of all three. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Cliff


Lenin at his desk circa 1920-1922. Shutterstock
Chris Hedges gave a talk on June 28, 2019 at the Left Forum in New York City titled “The Dilemma of Vladimir Lenin” condemning Lenin and his legacy for the world revolutionary movement. This is a review of that talk.

Lenin’s State and Revolution includes polemics against all of the idealist left currents including anarchists who did not understand the nature of the state in general and the bourgeoisie state in particular and therefore why a dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary for the triumph of the socialist revolution. Hedges fails to recognize that Lenin’s views in this pamphlet are directly derived from those of Marx and Engels. This aspect of Marxism is often sidelined but to Marx and Engels it was as fundamental to them as their materialist philosophy, their analysis of capitalism and the class struggle. Lenin starts by pointing out that ignoring their position on the nature of the state was a retreat from the revolutionary nature of Marxism. The first references to the “dictatorship of the proletariat” are to be found in the Communist Manifesto.

Our meaning of the term dictatorship of the proletariat is a Marxist term that is widely misunderstood and does not mean a police state or some other repressive regime. This society is a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie even the so-called democracies. They control not only the world economy but the organizations of the state apparatus as well as the ideology that is imparted in the education system, the mass media and to all of the cultural institutions. The aim is controlling how we all think and act and getting us to believe that “This is the best of all possible worlds.” In the end the police and armed forces are there to contain and eradicate any rebellion.

The dictatorship of the proletariat means the opposite. In a socialist society the economy will be organized and controlled by the workforce itself through democratically elected structures to produce their material needs. The views that will permeate education and culture will promote the internationalist and egalitarian outlook that is in the interest of the working class and its allies.

The courts and public institutions will be to serve, protect and promote the welfare of working people. And as the overthrown bourgeoisie are unlikely to accept these conditions, the working class will have to be organized and trained to defend itself and its achievements. This will involve the creation of an apparatus and militias that should repress right wing reaction while protecting the gains of the revolution. This is not necessarily a political dictatorship. The eradication of capitalist property relations and therefore the bourgeoisie are the preconditions for socialism.

In the hands of the Stalinists, as Trotsky predicted, the bourgeois property relations would return to the Soviet Union and the nation’s wealth stolen by a handful of bureaucrats. We have witnessed that happen since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

History has unlimited examples of the response of the ruling classes to rebellion—from the Spartacus revolt to the present. Their revenge when a revolt is quelled shows no bounds of morality or pity. They never stop to question whether “the ends justify the means”—they mete out punishments to participants, which also serve as a warning to others. The actual procedures are not carried out by the individual capitalists but by the institutions that they have created over time to protect them—particularly the police and the armed forces. (“The first function of an army is to maintain order at home.” —Winston Churchill.)
Hedges tells us that Lenin and Trotsky were opportunists “who employed political terror, widespread arrests and executions to crush the autonomous, self-governing soviets and workers committees. He led a central-ized, autocratic ruling elite...criminalized dissent, outlawed competing politi-cal parties, muzzled the press and insti-tuted a system of state capitalism that stripped workers of their autonomy and rights.” Divorced from the context of civil war and imperialist invasions these sound like inevitable atrocities when most of these acts were the norms of war then and consequence of condi-tions and circumstances that were beyond the Bolsheviks’ control.

Every war requires intelligence gathering. If all military strategy is made available for public debate then the enemy’s intelligence gathering is made easier. Keeping some information from one’s own side helps also to keep it from the enemy. Lenin and Trotsky were no opportunists but realists. The Bolshevik party had to be more determined than their political enemies if the revolution was to survive. This is what Lenin and Trotsky taught us above all.

History does not allow reruns but it does provide us with lessons for the future. Had Lenin said “Ok this revolution isn’t working, let’s meet the bourgeo-is representatives and peacefully hand them back the power.” How would that have ended? Augusto Sandino was murdered by the Nicaraguan National Guard when he went to meet them for negotiations. Such treachery has been a much-repeated experience. Ruling classes have no morals when it comes to threats to their interests.

The international bourgeoisie could have said “Well done getting rid of that parasitic aristocratic class. We will leave you alone to see how things work out.” As they did with the fascist regimes such as Mussolini’s, Franco’s and even Hitler’s for a while. Not a bit of it for the Russian Revolution—they recognized the threat of revolution spreading and sought to strangle the revolution as soon as possible. They were not immediately successful but the drain on the economy and the failure of the revolution to spread to Western Europe were among the con-ditions for Stalin and his kind to gain control of the party and the country. Chris Hedges recognizes these factors.

Party leaders must continually earn the right to lead and that includes the ability to move aside especially when their strategy has failed. Above all it means training our parties to accept dissident minorities. We demand that the wider world accept our democratic right to hold and express dissident views but inside most left wing parties they are sup-pressed.

Trotsky as early as 1923 predicted that the course of attempting to build socialism in one country would eventually lead to the restoration of capital-ism...only “he who never does anything never makes mistakes” wrote Lenin. The Bolsheviks had no handbook and few experiences to draw on other than the Paris Commune, which showed the consequences of the failure—the unfettered butchery of the Communards by the French ruling class.

From October 1917 on, everything the Bolsheviks did was experimental. Theory is a guide but the real world unmercifully challenges all theories and hopefully we learn from our suc-cesses, mistakes and setbacks.

A great quantity of Soviet records are now public and much more is now known of Lenin’s actions in power. If that evidence shows that Lenin became increasingly tyrannical we will accept those truths, but as Lenin himself said of Kautsky, “The valuable work he did will be ours forever.”

Our leaders past and present are not infallible gods, as the Stalinists would have it. They are humans who can make miscalculations and mistakes and if they do so we, and they, must recognize that. If our leaders cannot admit and correct their failures then they are not fit to lead. Marxists are not afraid of the truth.

Party building and cadres

In a revolutionary Marxist Party the rank and file members should not be slavish automatons who carry out the leadership’s dictates. We are not a reli-gious sect. In a proper democratic centralist party each member knows exactly why a course of action has been chosen, understands why they are doing what they are doing because they have been involved in all stages of the decision making process.

There are many different aspects to the development of individual party members but in the end we want a party of clear thinking determined leaders in the class struggles not a col-lective of party hacks. In the periods of less intense activity all members should be trained in a multitude of tasks, which are useful in external campaigns and in internal party responsibilities. There should be extensive education programs for members, sympathizers and the public in the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, which are still relevant guides to understanding the world today and how we should go about changing it for the better. Rosa
Luxemburg’s views too are legitimate and have to be considered an important part of our heritage.

We are all conscripts in class warfare but we can choose to be conscious volunteers in the struggle by joining a revolutionary party. Party leaders too often forget that. In State and Revolution Lenin says that no functionary should hold a position permanently and all should be subject to immediate recall. That principle can be put into practice in the Leninist party so that that becomes the normal behavior.

The issue of party democracy has to be paramount. One-hundred-years of experience with the Leninist model of party building has shown that entrenched leaders in the communist movement including “Trotskyist” organizations lead to stagnation and degeneration.

Party leaders must continually earn the right to lead and that includes the ability to move aside especially when their strategy has failed. Above all it means training our parties to accept dissident minorities. We demand that the wider world accept our democratic right to hold and express dissident views but inside most left wing parties they are suppressed.

In party building and cadre training, internal democracy in the truest sense should be encouraged and developed and has to be central to all of our discussion and activities. That is one of the biggest lessons of the last 100 years. In periods like this our activities will be limited but this is the time for education, reflection and learning.

We have learned that without a revolutionary party armed with revolutionary theory there will not be a successful revolution. We have a century of experience to draw on and learn how to build democratic socialist parties and eliminate the bureaucratic and Stalinist practices that have poisoned our movement and betrayed humanity.

The undemocratic and Stalinist practices, splits and expulsions which have decimated our movement almost all have their roots in the inability of one section of the party, especially leaders, to accept members with differing views on tactics not general theory. Out they go. The result is a multitude of minuscule and ineffective sects and the loss to the movement of many able comrades.

The opportunities presented to the Trotskyist movement from the 1960s have largely been squandered. The rise of Trump and Johnson is, in part, due to our failure to build a significant international party of the revolutionary left. While fighting among ourselves over minor points of theory or past events, we have failed to build effective working class parties to the left of Stalinism and social democracy.

Disillusionment and poverty are now fuelling right wing populist movements around the world who will try to eradicate us and our ideas when they feel they are able to.

**Is it possible to build a democratic centralist Leninist party?**

If we learn the lessons of the past century I believe the answer is not only yes, but essential. The emphasis in cadre education in the present period has to have democracy at the heart of all internal practices with the accommodation of comrades with differing views. A Marxist party should consist of activist members who are always learning and conscious participants in the external class struggle and internal discussion. The future of humanity is at stake now. The capitalist class is unwilling and unable to solve the current economic and ecological crisis and if they are not overthrown the human race faces extinction.

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1 “The Dilemma of Vladimir Lenin,” By Chris Hedges, Truthdig, July 1, 2019
https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-dilemma-of-vladimir-lenin/
Whitewashing American History

The WPA Mural Controversy in San Francisco

By Jack Heyman

There has been a controversy percolating the last couple of years over protests against the “Life of Washington” murals painted in 1935-36 by Works Progress Administration (WPA) artist Victor Arnautoff that are on display at George Washington High School in San Francisco. These murals dared to challenge the patriotic stereotype of Washington, instead portraying him as a slaveholder and military commander overseeing the genocide of American Indians. Seeking to portray the brutal reality of U.S. history, a reality that the ruling class—and textbooks—has always sought to falsify and obscure, the radical artist was in many ways far ahead of his time.

Yet now, the San Francisco Board of Education has voted to obliterate this militant anti-racist artist’s depiction of history that the racist rulers sought to deny. The argument justifying this censorship is that the images were “disturbing” to students. The threat to freedom of expression and free speech is real, and its real targets are the left, labor and those who understand that historical truth is a weapon for the oppressed and exploited. Here this vital freedom is being undermined not only by white supremacists and Trump but by “identity politics” Democrats.

A petition signed by more than 400 academics and educators from across the country and around the world calls for saving the Arnautoff murals. Historian/activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, author of An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States, warned, “The liberal campaign to destroy the Arnautoff timeline parallels the age of Trump that has found liberal Democrats invoking founding fathers, the constitution, American values, as patriotic “Hamilton: The Musical” has been introduced at a lightning rate into public school curricula. I think it possible that there is actually a deep well of U.S. patriotism that lurks behind the anti-mural campaign.”

Defending the Arnautoff murals

Every year in San Francisco during the entire month of July, Labor Fest (www.laborfest.net) celebrates workers history and culture. At International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 34 on July 9, Labor Fest held a panel discussion on the controversy over the Arnautoff murals including S.F. State University history professor emeritus Robert Cherney, Washington High School Alumni Association Vice President Lope Yap, Jr., and African American art professor and muralist Dewey Crumpler, who painted the “response” murals at the high school in 1968-1974. All of the panelists opposed the destruction of the Arnautoff murals.

Describing in detail how Arnautoff’s murals “critique the mythology of George Washington, in a moving KGO radio interview” in June, Crumpler recounts how as a six-year-old boy living in the then-segregated Hunters Point neighborhood of San Francisco, he was horrified seeing the image in Jet magazine of the grotesquely disfigured corpse of 14-year-old African American Emmett Till lynched in Mississippi for “offending” a white woman. That image was “indelibly imprinted in my head.” “That trauma worked its way through me and made me into an artist,” Crumpler declares. “I showed that image to my children because like my mother, I wanted them to confront this horror…. The image of Emmett Till’s body is “why black people all over America got in the streets and made it better for every person in this country.”

When Professor Cherney, who wrote a biography of Victor Arnautoff, began speaking at the panel discussion, a handful of people who favor destroying the murals harangued and disrupted the meeting for 20 minutes. The standing room only audience of mostly older leftists, veterans of labor, anti-war, anti-apartheid and civil rights struggles responded with “Shame, shame, shame!” The mainly white disrupters continued, grotesquely smearing those opposed to destruction of anti-racist art with shouts of “white supremacists!”

San Francisco’s Board of Mis-Education

At the start of the June 25 San Francisco Board of Education meeting, President Stevon Cook purloined and misused a quote from literary giant and activist Alice Walker. Had he known that Walker, a defender of freedom of expression, had written a letter to the Oakland School Board in 2014 objecting to their capitulation to the Oakland police demanding the censorship of a new curriculum on the writings of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the racist death penalty, perhaps he would not have cited her. Cook’s criticism of the Arnautoff murals as “violent images that are offensive to certain communities” sounds perversely like the OPD slanders of Mumia.

First to speak during the discussion were those who supported maintaining these historic murals, including Choctaw Indian elder Tamaka Bailey, Lope Yap, Jr., artists, a librarian and a number of trade unionists. The Board turned a deaf ear to those defending Arnautoff’s radical murals and voted unanimously to paint them over in line with the argument that students need to be sheltered from images such as that of a dead Native American at Washington’s feet. The Board is reviving the work of
right-wing predecessors who did not want students to learn about the historical truths Arnautoff and other leftist artists sought to expose.

A committee, the Reflection and Action Working Group, has been selected to determine how to destroy the mural. But the Alumni Association is collecting donations reportedly for a court suit to stop the removal and destruction of the murals.

**Radical murals rooted in class struggle**

This is not the first time radical murals have been under attack. The same year as the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, capitalist titan Nelson Rockefeller was destroying a mural, “The Future of Mankind,” painted by communist muralist Diego Rivera at New York’s Rockefeller Center. Why? Because it prominently featured Lenin and Trotsky, the leaders of the Russian Revolution, as well as Karl Marx.

That year there were two other militant strikes that caused the pillars of the Pacific Stock Exchange and Wall Street capitalists to shake: the Minneapolis Teamsters strike and the Toledo Auto-lite strike. All three of these strikes had things in common: avowed communists were in the leadership of the strikes; the National Guard was called out to bolster police forces suppressing the strike; workers were killed by police and martyred in these strikes overwhelmingly supported by working people. Additionally, the Minneapolis Teamsters subsequently organized workers defense guards to stave off attacks by the fascist Silver Shirts (who copied Hitler’s Brown Shirts in Germany.) Roosevelt had the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamsters jailed during WWII.

During the anti-red McCarthy witch hunts, Victor Arnautoff, a professor at Stanford and avowed Communist, was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). His HUAC dossier was read into the Record by California Congressman Donald L. Jackson, representing Santa Monica, who replaced future president Richard Nixon on the committee. Why was Arnautoff brought before the witch-hunters? Because he was defending his comrade, Anton Refregier, who was under attack for his Rincon Annex post office murals in San Francisco. These are seen as subversive because they depicted Chinese workers building the Trans-Continental Railroad and later under attack by racist, xenophobic mobs. These murals showed longshore workers fighting for a union hiring hall, and a commemoration of the two strikers killed by police in the ’34 maritime strike, precipitating the San Francisco General Strike.

The Refregier murals were targeted by HUAC, which claimed they “tend to promote racial hatred and class warfare.” The longshore union organized Black workers into the union, showing class solidarity 31 years before the Civil Rights Act, which long-time Dixiecrat Lyndon Johnson signed in 1965, while escalating U.S. imperialism’s war on Vietnam. “Racial hatred?” This was how red-hunters smeared radical artists’ depiction of militant struggles against racial oppression. An Arnautoff mural in Richmond, California, painted in 1936, just two years after the tumultuous maritime strike, prominently show an integrated longshore work force which made class struggle possible.

Defending the Refregier murals telling the true history of those strikes were the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the ILWU, which denounced the “Hearst-inspired attempt to suppress the work of art” (ILWU’s The Dispatcher, April 2, 1948). The Young Democrats of San Francisco charged the murals with being “little short of treason,” while the American Legion expressed concern that the murals would “expose thousands of school children” to “communist propaganda from which they needed to be protected.

**What and who is behind the “paint it down crowd:” school privatizers and guilty white liberals**

Vince Matthews, the privatizing Superintendent of the San Francisco School District, is front and center in today’s anti-mural campaign. He was principal of the notorious Edison Schools Inc.’s for-profit San Francisco
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) is a “progressive” group that has been organizing to rid the school of these “dangerous” murals. On their web page they pose for a photo of about 100 people (overwhelmingly white, except for one Black man) with signs, many of them reading “End White Silence.” Yet they are helping to silence and blot out the anti-racist voice of a red painter who was an artistic pioneer in speaking and showing the truth of how U.S. capitalism was rooted in slavery and genocide.

Ironically, this site of the photo—which illustrates SURJ’s “Open Letter on the Life of Washington Murals”—is Harry Bridges Plaza in front of the Ferry Building in San Francisco. It’s named for one of the longshore leaders of the 1934 “Big Strike” that gave rise to the ILWU, a momentous class struggle, which was won through the unity of white and Black workers. The longshore union, one of the first to integrate, has been a supporter of Arnautoff’s murals from the beginning. In 2017, the ILWU newspaper, The Dispatcher (November 2017) ran an article highlighting the artistic contributions of Arnautoff before an exhibition of his at San Francisco State University. In fact, the artist’s two sons became members of the longshore union.

In SURJ’s “Open Letter,” they call for schools to be made “culturally safe” by not exposing students to images where “Indigenous people are portrayed as shirtless savages and Black people as meek slaves.” This willful distortion smears Arnautoff’s work in the service of “safe space” guilty white liberalism, which is counterpoised to militant struggle to uproot racial oppression. Actually Arnautoff’s critical murals depict just the opposite, proud Native Americans who died at war” against genocidal “founding fathers” like Washington. Crumpler stated clearly, “I cannot abide by the destruction of art...in order [to] remove all those things that are traumatic in our lives,” so the then when we argue for remedy...we have no history to prove the murderous process.”

Defending art that seeks to tell the truth about history

Victor Arnautoff, who became a Stanford professor, had been an assistant in Mexico to the communist muralist Diego Rivera, who not only influenced his work—as vividly shown by the murals—but his politics. Arnautoff, who in his youth had fought on the wrong side in the Russian Civil War after the Bolshevik Revolution, under Rivera’s tutelage became a Communist. Others like performing artists Paul Robeson and Woody Guthrie, who were his comrades, would doubtless be standing shoulder to shoulder with those defending his murals.

The ILWU had a close relationship with the work of WPA artists since the 1930s. While the union bureaucracy has worked overtime to tame it in the service of the bosses’ rules and Democratic Party, longshore workers’ militant tradition of fighting the capitalist bosses and racists continues to reverberate today. We’ve marched for immigrant workers rights; shut down ports against U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal and an end to racist killings by the police.

In 2016, a contingent of longshore workers travelled to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to stand strong with the Sioux people against the Dakota Access Pipeline. The following year, the longshore union voted to mobilize to stop the fascist Patriotic Prayer group from rallying in San Francisco, a union strong-
hold. The fascists called off their rally. Where were the identity politics folks during these real struggles in defense of Native Americans and African Americans? Liberal white guilt groups like SURJ seeking “culturally safe” schools by censoring radical anti-racist art certainly won’t stop the racists.

To stop the mural-destroying liberals, there needs to be an outpouring of opposition, particularly from students and teachers and transport unions, like the demonstrations in 1948 that saved the Refregier murals at San Francisco’s Rincon Annex Post Office. It should demand “Hands Off the WPA Murals!” and “Don’t Whitewash Our Militant History.”

Jack Heyman is a retired Bay Area longshore activist. When he got up to defend the Arnautoff murals at the June 25 San Francisco school board meeting, speaking about the 1934 general strike, he was cut off after one minute by the would-be mural censors.

1 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZEMpyvdAXQ for the powerful commentary by Crumpler, who states that obliteration of the Arnautoff murals would render his own “irrelevant.”


“Uplifting” Perseverance Porn
The media just can’t stop presenting these horrifying stories
BY ALAN MACLEOD

“THIS IS AWESOME!” That’s how Fox 5 DC described its story of May 28, 2019 about Logan Moore of Cedartown, Georgia, a disabled two-year-old whose parents were unable to afford to buy him a walker, so employees at Home Depot fashioned one together themselves for him.

The story closely resembles another recent CNN report April 1, 2019: “A Two-Year-Old Couldn’t Walk on His Own. So a High School Robotics Team Built Him a Customized Toy Car.” That piece noted how Minnesotan toddler Cillian Jackson couldn’t walk due to a genetic condition, and how his parents couldn’t afford treatment. It described the ingenuity of the school children who built him a car, and Cillian’s new found freedom, but did not explore why a baby with a disability had been abandoned by U.S. society.

The clear implication in these stories was that those children would have been left permanently unable to move if not for the help of underpaid employees or the kindness of other children. How many disabled American children with poor parents were not so lucky? The articles did not ask. Instead, they were presented as “uplifting” human interest pieces.

Cillian’s story is part of CNN’s Good Stuff series, which asks its readers:

“Want more inspiring, positive news? Sign up for The Good Stuff, a newsletter for the good in life. It will brighten your inbox every Saturday morning.”

Unfortunately, these stories are part of a popular trend of unintentionally horrifying “uplifting” news, which we at FAIR have catalogued before (FAIR.org, August 3, 2017; March 25, 2019), where out-of-touch corporate media give us supposedly charming, whole-some and positive news that actually, upon even minimal retrospection, reveals the dire conditions of late capitalism so many Americans now live under, and makes you feel worse after reading it.

To corporate media, even the trauma of losing a parent and being forced onto the streets is merely an excuse, not a cause for poor grades. The implication is that poor housing, a lack of an adequate safety net, underfunded schools and a decimated public education system are simply excuses from bellyaching lazy people as to why they did not attend the private Boston University (at over $54,000 per year tuition), like the article’s author did.

A lot of these stories involve mothers and the extremely difficult circumstances of raising children in the U.S. while poor. CNN’s “feel good” story August 24, 2018 about a teacher sitting in a car with her student’s baby so the new mom could attend a job fair raised far more questions than it asked (which was zero.) Why is there so little public
childcare in the U.S.? Should a new mother really need to immediately find a job so badly? Is this good for infants’ development?

On a similar subject, Good Morning America July 17, 2018 describes the “trendy” new baby-shower gift of donating your pregnant co-worker your days off to give her maternity leave. Every country in the world except the U.S. and Papua New Guinea guarantees paid maternity leave, meaning the trend is unlikely to catch on abroad.

Many outlets (CBS, May 20, 2016; Huffington Post, August 6, 2016; People, April 11, 2016) cheerfully reported on how one man did at least 15 years of backbreaking labor as a night shift janitor at Boston College so his children could attend for free. But none even mentioned that if he lived in nearly any country in Western Europe, this wouldn’t have been necessary, as university there is free or virtually free to attend.

In fact, rather than discussing ballooning tuition costs, Yahoo!, November 15, 2017 used the story to take jabs at disloyal millennials:

“Millennials move from job to job in order to climb the ladder….For baby boomers and other generations…loyalty and dedication to a single company or career drove, and still drives, much of their working lives.”

Any of these stories could have been used to explore the pressing social and economic realities of being poor in the United States, and having to work for things considered fundamental rights in other countries. But instead they are presented as uplifting features, something only possible if we unquestionably accept the political and economic system.

**Kids do the darndest things**

Many of what Think Progress (August 2, 2018) labels “feel-good feel-bad stories” involve children doing things they wouldn’t have to in any reasonable society. CBS invites us to enjoy an account of a boy selling his Xbox computer to help his (single) mom (April 2, 2019), and another repairing his town’s ravaged roads himself (April 12, 2019). The Hill (June 10, 2019), meanwhile, describes a nine-year-old saving his pocket money to pay off his school friends’ “lunch debts.”

NBC (May 22, 2019) likewise shared the story of homeless Tennessee teen Tupac Moseley graduating high school as a valedictorian and earning many college scholarships, something that was widely reported (BBC, May 22, 2019; Newsweek, May 21, 2019; Business Insider, May 21, 2019). NBC matter-of-factly noted that after his father died, Moseley’s family’s home was foreclosed and they were on the streets, accepting this situation without comment. This was still among the most critical of the reports, however, as many did not even describe why a child in the richest society in history became homeless. CNN’s report May 22, 2019, for example, did not explain the background circumstances, let alone comment on them, and frames the story with the sentence, “Hardships were never an excuse for Moseley.”

This sentence is telling: To corporate media, even the trauma of losing a parent and being forced onto the streets is merely an excuse, not a cause for poor grades. The implication is that poor housing, a lack of an adequate safety net, underfunded schools and a decimated public education system are simply excuses from bellyaching lazy people as to why they did not attend
the private Boston University (at over $54,000 per year tuition), like the article’s author did.

“No excuses” is a common phrase in “perseverance porn” stories. For example, Today February 20, 2017 used it in the headline of a story about a Texas man who is forced to walk 15 miles to work every day. It reveals the ultimate bootstrap ideology of the media, where societal factors are irrelevant and everyone is where they are on merit.

Thus Moseley’s story is effectively weaponized by CNN against anyone who would question the system. Terrible work conditions? No excuses! Homeless? Stop complaining!

In case you thought homeless children were something of an aberration in America, CNN July 2, 2019 also recently ran a story about how over 100 homeless children graduated high school in New York City this year alone—again without comment on what this says about U.S. society.

Another reprehensible story treated as heroic by media was that of a Michigan mother who had to quit her job to look after her terminally ill son, who died of leukemia. She could not afford a headstone, so his best friend, a 12-year-old Kaleb Klakulak, worked many jobs to attempt to pay for one. Many media outlets (e.g., Associated Press, December 8, 2018; Fox News, December 9, 2018; NBC Chicago, December 12, 2018) celebrated Kaleb’s spirit, but none asked why other children are performing hard, outdoor labor through a Michigan winter so other children can have adequate burials. Such reporting implicitly normalizes this situation, and the system that allows it to happen.

“Sweet” stories

A common media trope is presenting kids selling lemonade as cute, sweet stories, no matter how horrifying or depressing the reason, including to pay off school lunch debts (Yahoo! News, May 21, 2019; MSN, May 22, 2019), or to raise money for their baby brother’s medical treatment (New York Post, May 28, 2018; CBS, May 29, 2018) or their mother’s chemotherapy (KTSM El Paso, August 4, 2018.)

Or how about the story of a New Mexico girl selling lemonade trying to fund her mother’s kidney transplant? People magazine (May 9, 2018) applauded her resolve, and local radio described it as “heartwarming” that she had raised over $1,000. The massive problem is a kidney transplant in America can cost over $400,000. To anyone with a heart, what this story actually represents is the desperate struggle of a child trying in vain to save her dying mother. Worse still is the fact that if she lived in Sweden, Spain or Saskatchewan, she would be given a kidney free of charge and without question.

Any of the numerous other outlets (ABC, April 30, 2019; Good Morning America, May 1, 2018; Albuquerque Journal, April 30, 2018) that picked it up could have used the story to discuss the dysfunctional healthcare system that is the leading cause of bankruptcy in the country, while producing some of the worst health outcomes in the developed world, or to scrutinize how corporate healthcare gouges the sickest and most vulnerable Americans, including children. Surely the most basic function of government should be to prevent its citizens from needlessly dying? Not if you wholly accept the tenets of neoliberalism, where education, housing and healthcare are not basic, inalienable human rights, but commodities to be bought and sold and bargained for on the market.

To be clear, while we can admire the never-say-die attitude of those in tough conditions, this is no substitute for guaranteed public programs to help those in dire need. The problem with perseverance porn is not the brave subjects of the articles, but the lack of any journalistic scrutiny examining the failings of society that placed them in such desperate circumstances to begin with.

What these articles highlight so clearly is not only the grim, inhuman and unnecessary conditions so many Americans are forced to live under, but the degree to which mainstream corporate journalists have completely internalized them as unremarkable, inevitable facts of life, rather than the consequences of decades of neoliberal policies that have robbed Americans of dignity and basic human rights. Because corporate media wholly accept and promote neoliberal, free-market doctrine, they are unable to see how what they see as “awesome” is actually a manifestation of late-capitalist dystopia.

—FAIR, July 21, 2019

https://fair.org/home/media-just-cant-stop-presenting-horrifying-stories-as-uplifting-perseverance-porn/?awt_l=OueCG&awt_m=j5UnIzX3XIR_TQ

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How to Be Human

One man’s lessons from the struggle

By John Gould

This country is full of amazing people and a unique history to boot. That being said, Black and Brown lives matter. Families belong together. People don’t cross borders; borders divide people. Actual invaders committed genocide on the indigenous population of this land. And the constitution was written not for white men, but for “wealthy land-owning” white men. Not only does white supremacy and privilege exist and are very real, but everyone who benefits from it should take personal responsibility and acknowledge this fact. Then all communities can work together to eradicate this modern evolution of slavery.

This country was built by enslaved and immigrant populations on the land of the victims of genocide. It’s offensive to think and behave like these facts of history are somehow irrelevant now. And it’s almost criminal to withhold this information from younger generations. If we don’t learn from history the likelihood of history repeating itself becomes greater and under this system it’s almost inevitable. In San Francisco public middle school books there is no history taught to expose where systemic racism and poverty is rooted. In my daughter’s seventh grade history book, enslaved Africans are referred to as migrant workers, who were necessary to the growth of this country because Native Americans didn’t know how to work or farm.

The police continue to disproportionately harass and arrest non-white people, and the criminal justice system continues to disproportionately prosecute in the same manner.

Working people are pitted against each other because we believe that there’s not enough to go around. There’s more wealth in the bank accounts of the ruling capitalist class than that one percent of the population could ever spend, and yet the system continues to squeeze and siphon more out of the working class than we ever see.

This is not the land of equal opportunity. Sure, given the right circumstances, anyone could participate in capitalism to create a better life for those immediately dependent upon them. But everyone isn’t this fortunate. And everyone deserves a sustainably healthy quality of life. One baby isn’t more or less deserving than another no matter what race, creed, color or gender. This planet provides an abundance that the capitalist system makes disposable. Capitalism breeds hate, intolerance, prejudice, selfishness, self-centeredness, and feeds into our ego and off of our spirit and souls.

Capitalism no longer serves a purpose to humanity; it only continues to devour all life on earth with little to no contribution back.

This is in our collective consciousness and we seek material validation to fill the void we feel after birth. When in the womb, two souls, two people are in unison. Complete unity. And when were born that unity is broken and a void is felt, this becomes what this system not only depends upon but preys upon.

Being in touch with being human you realize that unity is how we can heal and overcome any and all adversity. There’s no power with money, only more access to oppressive violence.

True power rests in words and actions of people, and ultimate power rests in the masses of people united in solidarity for a greater cause than oneself, this cause is community—com—with or together; unity—the state of being united or joined as a whole—a greater cause. When in touch with what it means to be human we realize that we want for others what we want for ourselves and vice versa. The only way to achieve this is through world communism, i.e., com—with or together; uni—one, having or consisting of one; ism—a distinctive practice system philosophy and/or political ideology. Communism—a system and philosophy of living together as one.

We hear things like competition breeds progress, but imagine cooperating instead of competing. The possibilities are endless. When players on a basketball team, for example, are competing with each other for control of the ball the team as a whole suffers; and when the team cooperates with the same goal in mind, and the players are more selfless, the team unites and becomes more fluid, flexible and successful.

People in balance with being human all have generally similar goals—food, shelter, education, and the need to contribute to community and society as a whole. We’re social beings that thrive in love and confidence and suffer in hate and fear.

Indigenous or aboriginal people around the world have known this for centuries. But this modern development of so-called civilization has lost sight of what it means to be human; has lost sight of the ideologies that are based on basic human principles like goodwill, compassion, respect, responsibility, empathy, service, reason, passion, integrity, open-mindedness, purpose and unity. This is what being human consists of. We’re taught that we are born in sin, and that we will always fall short of ideologies of humanity. And maybe individually we
By all accounts, the shutdown of Puerto Rico’s industries, schools, government and business-as-usual on Monday was an unexpected show of popular sentiment against ruling Governor Ricardo Rosselló. It was a true national strike, spreading from the capital in San Juan to all other major cities like Mayaguez, Ponce and Aguadilla.

While Rosselló was resistant to the initial calls and protests demanding his immediate resignation last week—following leaks that revealed misogynist and homophobic remarks he had made in private—the embattled leader finally succumbed on Wednesday night, announcing that he would step down next Friday.

Despite this success for half-a-million people who made Monday’s national strike possible, longtime Puerto Rican activists have been quick to assert that Rosselló’s resignation—and the fissures revealed by his blunders—will not easily be reconciled by minor reforms or proclamations.

“In our history, I don’t think there has been a moment like this one,” noted 76-year-old Oscar Lopez Rivera, widely regarded as the elder statesman of the island. “Even before the governor announced his resignation, the fact is that he was not governing Puerto Rico.”

Lopez Rivera, who was called the “Mandela of the Americas” throughout Latin America during his more than 35 years behind bars for supporting independence, has been living and working in San Juan since winning clemency in 2017.

“Yes, even though we still may not know how to build the new society we want...
to freely live in, we are feeling it! And it feels good,” she said.

Campaign for Human Rights activist Luis Rosa echoed Perez Rivera’s sentiments, saying, “Rosselló’s resignation must be seen as a victory for the will of the people, a newly found or rediscovered victory of a new generation.”

The former political prisoner—who was freed in 1999 after a massive international campaign—then offered some perspective: “Those seeking to replace Rosselló will promise a world of change, creating compacts with community base organizations and proposing everything right up to the border of revolutionary change. But the people are clear that the core of what we need are three basic things: decolonization, an end to our colonial status through a constitutional assembly; healthcare, free for all Puerto Rican citizens; and free public education up through the university level.”

Rosa is calling for the creation of a far-reaching think tank that could script out a strategy for the work of achieving liberation. “Let us create projects that can take independence out of the realm of the abstract and intangible or unexplainable,” he said. “We are building something we can use to break the fear of change.”

With a national general strike being arguably the greatest weapon an occupied and oppressed people can use to overthrow repressive regimes, Monday’s dramatic strike was not the only contemporary Puerto Rican demonstration numbering in the hundreds-of-thousands. Huge mobilizations have also taken place in response to the privatization and selling of Puerto Rico’s nationalized electric industry, U.S. military bombings of neighboring Vieques and the incarceration of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

While the hyper-colonial nature of Puerto Rico’s specific relationship to the United States may lead the course of “regime change” down a convoluted path, there are few Americans who understand the intricacies of Puerto Rico’s current “free associated state” status. Even most progressive people are barely aware that the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico began with direct marine intervention in 1898, and that the U.S. military still occupies choice lands throughout the archipelago.

What’s more, Puerto Ricans have been drafted to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces and sent disproportionately to the front lines of U.S. wars—despite the fact that they cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections, have no representation in Congress, and face harsh and extreme repression when they exercise rights that may contradict the wishes of Washington, D.C. As recently as June 24, the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization noted that “political insubordination” on the part of the colonial United States “impedes Puerto Rico’s ability to tackle its serious economic and social problems.”

It is therefore not difficult to sympathize with Oscar Lopez Rivera in his assertion that those who took part in the strike—led in large part by young women—understood that “they were the majority” and that, by shouting for an end to the ways things have been, “they were decolonizing themselves.”

According to Lopez Rivera, Puerto Ricans are calling for “a total transformation towards a free and independent nation. And what we are witnessing is a movement that can’t be stopped.” Ultimately, he concluded, “Puerto Rico will be the nation it has the potential of becoming.”

Matt Meyer is the secretary general of the International Peace Research Association. Author and editor of nine books, he contributed to both of Oscar Lopez Rivera’s titles: Between Torture and Resistance and Cartas a Karina. Meyer was a leading figure in the international aspects of the campaign to free Oscar. He is also a senior research fellow with the University of Massachusetts Amherst Resistance Studies Initiative.

—Waging Nonviolence, July 25, 2019

https://wagingnonviolence.org/2019/07/puerto-rico-protests-ricardo-rossello-resignation-activists-next-steps/

The demand of the Cuban-American Right for full implementation of Title III of the 1996 Helms-Burton Law, announced by the Trump administration on April 17, is rooted in the 1959-1961 conflict between the Cuban Revolution and the Cuban national bourgeoisie; when the Revolution in power, with the overwhelming support of the people, took necessary decisive steps that the national bourgeoisie interpreted as incompatible with its fundamental economic interests.

The relation between the Cuban Revolution and the Cuban national bourgeoisie did not begin as conflictual. Representatives of the national bourgeoisie were allied with revolutionary organizations in an anti-Batista coalition, and lawyers tied to the national bourgeoisie constituted the majority of the ministers of the Revolutionary Government established in early January 1959. These political dynamics reflected, in part, the Revolution’s goals of economic diversification and industrial development, which Fidel Castro conceived as ideally including the national industrial bourgeoisie. Reinforcing this orientation, a liberal sector of the bourgeoisie expressed a desire to develop toward an independent national bourgeoisie. Accordingly, the Revolutionary Government during its first eighteen months took no action against the class interests of the national bourgeoisie.

The first property expropriations were enacted on February 28, 1959. As confiscations of the property of Cuban nationals associated with the Batista regime, they were not directed against the interests of the national bourgeoisie as a class. The Batista dictatorship of 1952 to 1958 was characterized by blatant corruption, repression, and brutality, and the popular thirst for justice could not prudently be ignored by the Revolutionary Government. The confiscated properties were converted into public buildings, such as primary schools, day care centers, medical clinics, multiple housing units, and embassies.

The second act of expropriation was the nationalization of large-scale agricultural lands, making no distinction between foreign-owned and Cuban-owned land. The Agrarian Reform Law of May 17, 1959 adversely affected the interests of foreign capital and the national estate bourgeoisie, but it did not directly affect the interests of the national industrial bourgeoisie. Agrarian Reform was made necessary by a neocolonial situation defined by extensive foreign ownership of land, by concentration of land, and by peasants working on land they did not own. The Law set the maximum quantity of land per proprietor at 406 hectares; and it provided for compensation for expropriated lands in the form of twenty-year bonds, with its value based on what the owners had declared in tax reports. The expropriated land was used to form peasant cooperatives (mostly in sugar) and state-managed agricultural enterprises (mostly in rice and cattle); or it was distributed to peasants, who thus became small independent farmers. The nationalization of agricultural land facilitated a significant increase and diversification in agricultural production, primarily as a result of the cultivation of previously unused land, which had been purchased as financial speculation.

The concept of agrarian reform as a foundation for industrial and agricultural development in no sense implied the elimination of national big industry. In the ceremony signing the
Agrarian Reform Law, Fidel observed that when the landholders receive money for their agrarian reform bonds in twenty years, they will be able to invest it in industry. In a banquet for businesspersons on August 27, 1959, Fidel spoke of the importance of developing national industry, and he declared that businesspersons are among the people who are called to defend the Cuban Revolution. Noting the gains that the Revolution has brought to the nation, he declared that “you gathered here, and especially you, have before you the opportunity to work enthusiastically in this work. . . I invite you to patriotism.” On September 13, 1959, Fidel spoke of the importance of investing in machinery and in new factories to increase production, observing that such investment could be made by private industry or by the state. The Cuban owners of industry, Fidel noted, also could put their profits in Cuban banks, inasmuch as bank reserves could be used by the state to invest in production.

The nature of the national bourgeoisie

However, in spite of the intentions of the Revolutionary Government, the unfolding revolutionary process demonstrated that Cuban conditions did not permit the incorporation of the national industrial bourgeoisie in the revolutionary project. The Cuban industrial bourgeoisie had been forged in the context of the U.S. dominated neocolonial republican, and it therefore was a “figurehead bourgeoisie,” totally subordinated to U.S. capital. At the same time, the national industrial bourgeoisie did not clearly differentiate itself as a social class, with distinct economic interests and ideology, from the national estate bourgeoisie. As a privileged class that was economically and ideologically weak, the national industrial bourgeoisie was incapable of finding common cause with the nationalist economic measures of the Revolution; its political perspective was shaped by international capital and Cuban estate capital, with which it was economically and ideologically tied.

Accordingly, from mid-1959 to mid-1960, members of the national industrial bourgeoisie left the country and/or participated in the counterrevolution in increasing numbers. On July 6, 1960, Fidel observed that the unfolding revolutionary process is demonstrating that the great international interests and the privileged interests within the nation are allies. “The Revolution is teaching us that those who had control of the nation in their hands are inclined to submission to foreign interests and to treason,” deserting the nation in increasing numbers with each revolutionary measure. They know, he stated, that the Revolution has struck at the interests of the foreign power, and therefore they place their hopes in the support of those foreign interests. On that same date, the Revolutionary Government emitted Law 851, which expanded the Law of October 13 and 14, 1960, that its duty was “to take measures that the circumstances required and to adopt methods that would definitively liquidate the economic power of the privileged interests that conspire against the people, proceeding to the nationalization of the large industrial and commercial enterprises that have not adapted to the revolutionary reality of our country.” On October 13 and 14, 1960, the Revolutionary Government emitted three laws authorizing the nationalization, with compensation, of Cuban owned properties in big industry and commerce, banking, and housing. (1) Law 890 nationalized 381 Cuban big industrial and commercial companies. The Law established payment of compensation in accordance with a subsequent law. At the same time, the Law affirmed that the interests of small and medium companies can and ought to coincide with those of the nation. (2) Law 891 nationalized private banks with Cuban proprietors, providing compensation in the form of fifteen-
year bonds, plus an immediate partial cash payment. (3) The Urban Reform Law nationalized housing properties, converting renters into proprietors and providing compensation of the previous proprietors, thereby transforming a housing system that had been rooted in profit and financial speculation.

On November 8, 1960, Fidel declared that there will not be further nationalizations, except in cases in which the owners have abandoned the country. Notwithstanding, Cuban industrialists not affected by the October 13 nationalizations increasingly emigrated and displayed comportment inconsistent with the national economic goals. On July 26, 1961, Fidel noted that virtually all of the big industrialists had left the country.

Reflecting the ongoing counterrevolutionary comportment and emigration of the national bourgeoisie, the Revolutionary Government emitted Law No. 947 on June 27, 1961. This law was emitted ten weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion, a dramatic event that included significant participation by the émigré national bourgeoisie. It authorized the nationalization of more companies in accordance with the principles of Law No. 890 of October 13, 1960. On the basis of this new Law, nine resolutions nationalizing 842 companies were issued from June 30, 1961 to July 27, 1962. Said resolutions affirmed that the company owners were conducting themselves in opposition to the goals of the revolutionary transformation of the economy by abandoning their companies, sabotaging production, or generating labor conflicts.

**The end of the national bourgeoisie as a class**

The nationalizations of October 13, 1960 to July 27, 1962 constituted the liquidation of the national bourgeoisie as a class, and the incorporation of productive and commercial activities into the structure of the state. This was not the plan envisioned by Fidel in 1959; it was an adaptation by the Revolution to the conduct of the national bourgeoisie, which was unable to transform itself from a figurehead bourgeoisie into an independent national bourgeoisie allied with a popular revolutionary project.

In a meeting of journalists on March 25, 1961, Fidel referred to his effort in 1959 to awaken the patriotism of the industrialists. He believed that, even though it appeared useless, an effort had to be made to persuade the privileged class to accept the revolutionary reality, adapt to it, and aid the country in Revolution. He maintained that all were invited to the revolutionary process, but they did not want to be included.

The inclusive attitude of Fidel toward the national bourgeoisie was correct, even though his appeal to patriotism was ignored, as many, including Fidel himself, had anticipated. No one could foresee with certainty that leaders within the bourgeoisie would not emerge, in the context of that historic national moment, leading the national bourgeoisie toward patriotic adaptation to revolutionary goals. It was Fidel’s duty to give this possibility, however small, an opportunity.

By its counterrevolutionary comportment and emigration, the Cuban national bourgeoisie in effect refused to negotiate the compensation offered by Revolutionary Government. Its interest was regime change, which was virtually impossible under the political conditions after January 1, 1959. In their politically inept response, the members of the privileged class were demonstrating their unpreparedness for the historic moment, as a result of lies, deceptions, and distortions they had learned to tell themselves over the course of several decades.

What will happen now? In my view, based on comments by Cuban government officials and news commentators, Cuba may not view the U.S. government as an appropriate representative of the interests of persons (or their descendants) who were Cuban citizens at the time of the property expropriations. Moreover, Cuban courts likely would consider claims with respect to properties confiscated for criminal behavior only in exceptional cases, such as a claim that a particular owner in fact did not engage in criminal behavior. With respect to the nationalized properties, in which the Revolutionary Government affirmed the right of compensation, Cuba might want to point out that even these properties are implicated in criminal behavior, because of the comportment of the fleeing national bourgeoisie. Cuba likely would insist that a just resolution would have to take into account the damage done to the people of Cuba by terrorist activities and economic aggression, which were supported in varying degrees by the great majority of the members of a national bourgeoisie that had chosen to abandon the nation.

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—CounterPunch, June 28, 2019

The national liberation stage must precede the construction of the national state. Recognizing this provides a compass to guide us in our national priorities and relations with others. This means no more agreements with the occupiers. They will not commit to agreements, and experience shows they are part of a great deception, falsely called a “peace process.”

This “Peace Process” became a façade for the colonial entity to proceed with a so-called “political solution.” Really, they needed Palestinian participation to pave the way for the oppressive Arab regimes to end the boycott and “normalize” relationships with the entity.

...national liberation requires confronting, not submitting to, foreign hegemony...

As Arab markets were closed to the Zionist entity by a blockade, it was necessary to find ways to open them through “normalization.” But Palestinian resistance had generated popular sympathy in the Arab and Islamic world, and formed a major obstacle to this “normalization.” Zionist leader Shimon Perez admitted: “The main goal of the Oslo conventions was not Palestinians, but rather normalization with the Arab world and opening its markets.”

Yet national liberation requires confronting, not submitting to, foreign hegemony. We say that the leadership of our national movement has ignored this, and has instead engaged in binding relations with the occupying entity and its patrons.

The history of the colonial entity in Palestine is nothing more than a history of the destruction of the Palestinian people and their civilization. Two thirds of our people have been displaced and more than 90 percent of our land has been stolen. Our land, water and houses are stolen and demolished every day, while apartheid walls are built and the racist nation-state law is being enforced by Israeli legislators. There is also a permanent aggression against the peoples of the region, to subjugate them through Salafist terrorism and economic siege.

The USA supports the Zionist entity with money, weapons, missiles and aircraft, while protecting it from punishment at the UN, recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, abolishing its financial support for the United Nations Refugees and Work Agency (UNRWA) and halting its financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. How can the USA or its regional puppets ever be “honest brokers” for the people of Palestine?

The invaders falsely used divine religion in attempts to destroy the indigenous people and their cultures. They said this was an “empty land,” available for another people with no land, but with the “divine promise” of a religious homeland. Yet hiding settler colonization behind the banner of Judaism wrongly places responsibility on religion for the crimes of the colonizers.

We have no problem with “Jewish” people in Palestine. That problem emerged in capitalist Europe, not in our countries. We are not the ones to create a solution to Europe’s “Jewish problem.” Rather, we have to deal with colonization and foreign hegemony in our region.

The colonial entity and its imperial patrons have brought the people of
Palestine to a historic juncture. We, the residents of historic Palestine, must dismantle the terms of our collective extermination so as to set up relations, which reject racial segregation and mutual negation. We must dismantle the closed structure and replace it with an open, non-imperial and humane system. This can only be achieved by establishing One Democratic State of Palestine for its indigenous people, the refugees who we were forced out of the country and its current citizens. This is the key to a “fair and permanent solution of conflict” in the region, and to a “just solution” for the Palestinian cause. Failing this, war and mutual destruction will continue.

Yet the old Palestinian leadership has presided over regression. They make agreements for the benefit of the colonial entity and its patrons. They abandon 1948 Palestine and the refugees. They collaborate with our enemies while delivering no tangible benefit for our people.

For these reasons we say that this leadership has become a real obstacle to any future development or advancement for our people. This leadership has lost its qualifications to lead national action. It looks to its own benefit and is too weak to learn the lessons of the anti-colonial movements of the peoples of Asia, Africa and the Americas. It does not see the advances elsewhere in challenging U.S. hegemony. It does not even see the resistance in the Arab and Muslim World, when they manage to foil U.S. and Zionist projects.

Our movement must be an organic part of the Arab Liberation Movement, putting an end to foreign hegemony, achieving national unity and liberating Palestine from the current apartheid system. Yet this great humanitarian goal directly clashes with the interests of the dominant triad—the forces of global hegemony, settler apartheid and the comprador Arab regimes.

We warn all against chasing the myth of “two contiguous states” in Palestine. This is a major deception, to portray ethnic enclaves within Palestine as an expression of the right to popular self-determination. The goal must be to replace apartheid with equal citizenship and this can only be achieved by establishing One Democratic State in historic Palestine for all, including its indigenous people, the refugees who we were forced out of the country and its current citizens, including those who were drawn into the country as settlers through the Zionist project.

...hiding settler colonization behind the banner of Judaism wrongly places responsibility on religion for the crimes of the colonizers...

Palestinian parties negotiating for unity and reform should focus on restoring liberation to the core of the Palestinian National Charter. The Arab homeland will never be liberated and unified by subordination to the USA! It will only be liberated by confronting and ending colonial and imperial dominance.

We say YES to national unity in the framework of our Palestinian Liberation Movement, freed from deceptive agreements, which only serve the hegemonic powers and comprador regimes.

LONG LIVE PALESTINE, liberated from racial colonization and built on the foundations of equality for all its citizens, rejecting segregation and discrimination by religion, culture or ethnicity; friends with its regional neighbors and with all progressive forces of the world.

Call for a Palestine Liberation Movement

Call initiated by the One State Assembly, February 9, 2019

We are calling for signatures on the statement to create national and global public opinion especially among Palestinians, Arabs and international supporters about the genuine, just and long lasting solution to the seven decades of the ethnic cleansing war and catastrophe of 1948. The One Democratic State of Palestine (ODSP) initiative stands in opposition and objection to the dead solution of the two states, the Oslo Accords and exposing the latest racist Nation-State Law that was issued by the apartheid state of Israel, which emphasizes the real nature of this manufactured colonial state.

This is a crucial time in the history of our struggle, which needs all activists, individuals and organizations, to consolidate and coordinate their efforts in an organized manner to make an impact, make a difference towards the only solution that guarantees the right of return and deals with our people as one united nation on one united homeland: the One Democratic State of Palestine.


Endorsers: Free Palestine Movement, Palestine Solidarity Forum (India), Syria Solidarity Movement, International Committee for Peace Justice and Dignity, Hands Off Syria Coalition, Hamilton Coalition to Stop the War, United Front Against Facism and War (Canada), Communist Reconstruction (Canada), Palestine Solidarity Association/University of Western Cape (South Africa), India Palestine Solidarity Forum, Venezuela Solidarity Network, Free Palestine Movement, Akashma News, Media Review Network, Solidarity

Continued on page 45
Israel’s Latest Attempt to Erase Palestine

By Ilan Pappe

The attempt to suppress official documentation of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948 is not new.

But efforts by teams from the Israeli defense ministry to remove sensitive documents from Israeli archives—as reported by the Haaretz newspaper recently—must be understood in a new political climate and are not simply an attempt to spare Israeli government’s embarrassment, as some have suggested.

Those of us working with Nakba documents—Nakba means “catastrophe” and is the term Palestinians use for the expulsion in 1948 of some 800,000 people from their lands and homes in what became Israel—were already aware of the removal of these documents. For many years, for instance, historians were unable to revisit “the village files,” which formed an important proof in my argument that 1948 was an act of ethnic cleansing.

Some of the crucial material Benny Morris used on the Deir Yassin and al-Dawayima massacres could also not be re-opened. They all detailed a more honest Israeli version of the causes leading to what was termed the “Palestinian exodus” in 1948.

Why are these files being hidden? In 2016, the journalist Lisa Goldman assumed that the reason was that the works of the “new historians” embarrassed the government and undermined Israel’s international standing.

The documents certainly challenged the official Israeli version of a voluntary Palestinian flight and exposed war crimes committed by Zionist and later Israeli forces.

But I think the reasons are far more profound and alarming. They are part of a new assault on Palestine and the Palestinians.

Taking the politics out of Palestine

We need to look at the attempt at censoring these archives in two contexts: the political and the historical.

Politically, the removal of these documents has to be seen as part of an overall American-Israeli initiative (or at least tendency) to try to depoliticize the “Palestine question.”

In Israel, this began with Benjamin Netanyahu’s ideas about an “economic peace,” the attempt to induce the Palestinians to give up their political demands in return for an improved economic reality.

It continued with the legislation of the Nakba Law, which withdrew any government funding for public bodies and institutions that would commemorate the 1948 events as a catastrophe.

An important part of this strategy includes Israeli actions on the ground—settlement expansion, house demolitions, village clearances—that bring us closer to an official annexation of Area C—approximately 60 percent of the West Bank—into Israel and the establishment of small Bantustans in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

A number of Israeli politicians and officials have been quite open about wanting to annex all or parts of the West Bank, including, of course, the prime minister himself.

Finally, there is the Israeli nation-state law, which passed in 2018. This law consolidated Israel as an apartheid state.

One particular clause in the law is relevant to our discussion: it stipulates that the right to exercise national self-determination in the country is “unique” to the Jewish people.

On the American side, meanwhile, the Trump administration has taken a number of steps that complement the Israeli attempt to erase Palestine as a political issue and Palestinians as a national movement.

These measures included the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the transfer there of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv; ending financial support for UNRWA, the UN body that caters for Palestinian refugees; removing the PLO delegation from Washington; and a Bahrain conference focused on financial incentives for the Palestinians with no mention of any political rights.

Together, the Israeli and American campaigns amount to a new assault on Palestine and the Palestinians. The Palestinians are very vulnerable at this moment: Arab regimes are deserting them, the international community’s elite is indifferent, and Palestinians themselves are divided between Hamas and Fatah.

Eliminating the native

Israeli and American intentions combined with the vulnerability of the Palestinians bring us to a dangerous historical juncture. Israel is now in a position to attempt once more to act according to the logic of the “elimina-

Continued from page 44

Net, Kenya, Human Rights in the Middle East, Cleveland Peace Action, Interfaith Council For Peace In The Middle East Northeast Ohio, Pax Christi Hilton Head, Portsmouth South Downs Palestine Solidarity Campaign

—One Democratic State of Palestine, September 2, 2019

https://odspal.net
tion of the native” (the anthropologist Patrick Wolfe’s characterization of the motives behind settler colonial movements such as Zionism.)

Israel succeeded only partly in implementing this aim in 1948. The Palestinian national movement and people struggled successfully then, and continue to struggle now, against the completion of the ethnic cleansing of 1948.

But this is a difficult moment. Abroad, efforts to shield Israel from criticism have intensified.

Pro-Palestinian politicians are defamed as anti-Semites. Legislation is being introduced in different countries to protect Israel from criticism and activism, including boycotts.

Removing archival material and the possible destruction of documents expose the deeper ideological motives behind this current assault on Palestine and the Palestinians.

How much has this undermined our ability to reconstruct what happened in the Nakba and for assessing its significance today?

In many ways, we have been here before. Israel looted the PLO archives in October 1982, destroyed part of them, transferred some of them to Israel and returned a small portion.

In 2001, Israel raided the Orient House in East Jerusalem and stole the archives there.

Now Israel raids its own archives to cleanse them of evidence of its past crimes.

Will this damage our ability to reconstruct the past?

In one way, no. The Palestinian refugees after 1948 did not need Israeli “new historians” to tell them that they were victims of ethnic cleansing.

Archival evidence is needed, though, to expose the intent and planning behind the crime and for contextualizing the past within a wider understanding of the nature of the Zionist movement and Israel.

For both purposes, documents already seen, and in many cases already scanned and digitized for posterity, are enough to prove beyond doubt the Zionist ideological intent behind the attempt to eliminate the Palestinians in 1948 and after.

While there is no one “smoking gun” document proving the full intent behind the ethnic cleansing—although, as the scholar Walid Khalidi commented, a paper known as Plan D came very close—there are enough discrete documents that together expose the crime against humanity Israel committed against the Palestinians.

Erasing Palestine

As we move forward in time, from 1948 on, the information is more accessible and any attempt to destroy or hide it is bound to fail. Students, historians, pundits and activists can see very clearly the pattern of violence Israel inflicted and continues to inflict on the Palestinians (in this respect, one is reminded of another remark by Patrick Wolfe that settler colonialism is not an event but a structure).

Nevertheless, the origins of this structural violence is in the Nakba and therefore its documentation is important. It is this origin that explains Israeli policies since 1948: the imposition of military rule on Palestinians inside Israel until 1966 and its transition onto the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967; the Judaization policy of expropriation of land and displacement in the Galilee, the Jerusalem area and the Naqab (Negev); the brutal repression of the two intifadas; the destruction of southern Lebanon in 1982 and 2006 and finally the inhuman siege on Gaza.

All these criminal policies can be proven without declassifying Israeli documents but are better historicized and contextualized if supported by documentation that show how—in the case of Israel—the “logic of elimination of the native” was being implemented.

We need to accumulate and present clearly what I would call indicative documents, which are very near to a “smoking gun” proof of the intention, inhumanity and purpose of the 1948 ethnic cleansing. I have displayed several of these documents on my public Facebook page, but we need proper archives that can be safeguarded from a
state and an international coalition that wants to erase Palestine from our historical memory and to diminish it into an economic question.

This is not the first nor will it be the last attempt to erase Palestine. Sometimes these attempts are hidden from the eye but are nonetheless are highly significant and can only be traced by professional historiography.

In March 1964, Israel demanded that American citizens who had passports issued with the designation “Palestine” would be issued with new passports without that designation. The U.S. State Department complied.

“We will cease using ‘Palestine’ in passports as place of assignment and cease issuing, renewing, or amending passports with seal bearing word ‘Palestine’,” a telegram informed the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv.

But Palestine is not designation, and not a place of assignment that exists only in archives, open or closed. It is a real country, under colonization and occupation.

We should all strive to continue to tell its history as it explains the present and influences our future.

The author of numerous books, Ilan Pappe is professor of history and director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter.

—The Electronic Intifada, July 25, 2019

https://electronicintifada.net/content/israels-latest-attempt-erase-palestine/27941

Israel’s War on Innocence

Palestinian children in Israeli military courts

BY RAMZY BARoud

On July 29, four-year-old Muhammad Rabi’ Elayyan was reportedly summoned for interrogation by the Israeli police in occupied Jerusalem. The news, originally reported by the official Palestinian news agency, WAFA, was later denied by the Israeli police, more than likely in an attempt to lessen the impact of the PR disaster that followed.

The Israelis are not denying the story in its entirety, but are rather arguing that it was not the boy, Muhammad, who was summoned, but his father. It was Rabi’ Elayyan, they claim, who was called into the Israeli police station in Salah Eddin Street in Jerusalem to be questioned regarding his son’s actions.

The child was accused of hurling a stone at Israeli occupation soldiers in the Issawiyeh neighborhood, which is a constant target for Israeli violence. The neighborhood has also been the tragic location of house demolitions under the pretext that Palestinians there are building without permits. Of course, the vast majority of Palestinian applications for such permits to build in Issawiyeh, or anywhere else in Jerusalem, are denied routinely, while Jewish settlers are allowed to build on stolen Palestinian land unhindered.

As such, Issawiyeh is no stranger to the ridiculous and unlawful behavior of the Israeli army. On July 6, for example, a mother from the beleaguered neighborhood was arrested in order to put pressure on her teenage son, Mahmoud Ebeid, to turn himself in. The mother “was taken by Israeli police as a bargaining chip,” Mondoweiss reported, quoting the Jerusalem-based Wadi Hileh Information Center.

The Israeli authorities are justified in feeling embarrassed by the whole episode concerning the four-year-old boy, thus the attempt to poke holes in the story. The fact is, though, that WAFA’s correspondent in Jerusalem had, indeed, verified that the warrant was in Muhammad’s, not Rabi’s, name.

While some news sources bought into the Israeli propaganda, and readily conveyed the cries of “fake news,” one must bear in mind that this was hardly a one-off incident. For Palestinians, such news about the detention, beating and killing of their children has been one of the most consistent features of the Israeli occupation since 1967.

Just one day after Muhammad was summoned, the Israeli authorities also interrogated the father of a six-year-old child, Qais Firas Obaid, from the same neighborhood of Issawiyeh. This particular boy was accused of throwing a juice carton at Israeli soldiers.

“According to local sources in Issawiyeh the [Israeli] military sent Qais’s family an official summons to come to the interrogation center in Jerusalem on Wednesday [July 31] at 8:00 A.M.,” reported the International Middle East Media Centre (IMEMC). In one photo, the little boy is holding the Israeli military order written in Hebrew up to the camera.

The stories of Muhammad and Qais are the norm, not the exception. According to the prisoners’ advocacy group, Addameer, there are currently 250 Palestinian children being held in Israel’s prisons. Approximately 700 Palestinian children are taken through the Israeli military court system every single year. “The most common charge levied against children is throwing stones,” reports Addameer, “a crime
that is punishable under military law by up to 20 years in prison.”

That is why Israel has every right to be embarrassed. Since the start of the Second Intifada in 2000, some 12,000 Palestinian children have been detained and interrogated by the Israeli army.¹

Moreover, it is not only children and their families who are targeted by the Israeli military, but also those who advocate on their behalf. Just last week, on July 30, Palestinian lawyer Tariq Barghouth was sentenced to 13 years in prison by an Israeli military court for “firing at Israeli buses and at security forces on a number of occasions.”

As unlikely as the accusation of a well-known lawyer firing at “buses” may sound, it is important to note that Barghouth is well-regarded for his defense of Palestinian children in court. He has also been a headache for the Israeli military court system for his strong defense of Ahmad Manasra. The then 13-year-old boy was tried and indicted in Israeli military court for allegedly stabbing and wounding two Israelis near the illegal Jewish settlement of Pisgat Ze’ev in Occupied Jerusalem in 2015. Manasra’s cousin, Hassan, 15 was killed on the spot, while the wounded Ahmad was tried in court as an adult. It was Barghouth who challenged and denounced the Israeli court for the harsh interrogation and for secretly filming the wounded child as he was tied to his hospital bed.

On August 2, 2016, Israel passed a law that allows the authorities to “imprison a minor convicted of serious crimes such as murder, attempted murder or manslaughter even if he or she is under the age of 14.” The law was crafted conveniently to deal with cases like that of Ahmad Manasra, who was sentenced on November 7, the same year, three months after the law was approved, to 12 years in prison. Manasra’s case, the leaked videos of his abuse by Israeli interrogators and his harsh sentence placed more international focus on the plight of Palestinian children in the Israeli military court system. “Israeli interrogators are seen relying on verbal abuse, intimidation and threats to apparently inflict mental suffering for the purpose of obtaining a confession,” attorney and international advocacy officer at Defense for Children—Palestine, Brad Parker, said at the time.²

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Israel has been a signatory since 1991, “prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Yet, explains Parker, “ill treatment and torture of Palestinian children arrested by Israeli military and police is widespread and systematic.”

So systematic, in fact, that videos and reports of arresting very young Palestinian children are almost a staple on social media platforms concerned with Palestine and Palestinian rights.

The sad reality is that Muhammad Elayyan, four, and Qais Obaid, six, and many children like them, have become a target of Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This horrendous reality must not be tolerated by the international community. Israeli crimes against Palestinian children must be confronted effectively for the simple reason that Israel, its inhumane laws and iniquitous military courts must not be allowed to continue their uncontested brutalization of those who are, at the end of the day, children. Israel’s war on their innocence must be stopped.

—Middle East Monitor, August 7, 2019


¹ https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190731-israel-summons-father-of-6-year-old-palestinian-child-who-throw-carton-at-soldiers/
I am in Hong Kong, never having been there before. But having been to mainland China several times a year in the past decade, the urge to draw comparisons is irresistible.

Of course, unlike the mainland which never was a part of the British empire, the vestiges of Hong Kong’s colonial past are everywhere—from the British street names to the fact that driving is on the left-hand side of the road. Its legal and political systems are also derived from their British counterparts.

This colonial past posed problems when Britain’s 99-year lease on Hong Kong expired in 1997, and its sovereignty was returned to China.

The former colony became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), administered under the formula “one country, two systems.”

This 1997 administrative formula runs for 50 years, and Hong Kong’s administrative relationship with mainland China will be reassessed and probably reconfigured in 2047.

The slogan “one country, two systems” effectively acknowledges that the wholesale integration of Hong Kong into the PRC was not going to be implemented, at least not until 2047 if at all.

A reflection of this is the fact that the official languages of Hong Kong are Cantonese Chinese (but not Mandarin as in mainland China) and English.

The limited self-government enjoyed by Hong Kong is viewed as a constraint by Hongkongers suspicious of the PRC. Only 50 percent of Hong Kong’s Legislative Council is directly elected and the Chief Executive (Hong Kong’s de facto political leader) is chosen by a Beijing-approved committee.

This is a system designed to limit mass political power by placing it in the hands of a plutocratic elite.

Equally, the PRC views self-government, limited though it is, as another kind of constraint, since it would clearly like a much firmer grip on Hong Kong’s affairs.

Tension between Hongkongers and the PRC has culminated in major protests on two occasions in recent years.

The Umbrella Movement protests took place between September 26 and December 15, 2014, and involved a number of occupied sites.

The protests began after the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPCSC) proposed reforms to Hong Kong’s electoral system. These reforms were alleged to involve the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) pre-screening of candidates for the election of the Chief Executive.

There was some violence, but the police adopted a strategy of attrition by clearing the occupied sites piecemeal, and the protest petered-out when the last site was vacated in the middle of December 2014. The protesters did not gain any concessions from the government.

The most recent protests began on June 9 this year, and are continuing as I write.

The protests arose over fears that the Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill proposed by the Hong Kong government would weaken the separation between the Hong Kong and mainland China legal systems, by allowing Hong Kong residents to be extradited to the mainland if charged with crimes there.

The protesters are concerned that Hong Kong residents and even those visiting it would be subject to the jurisdiction of courts controlled by the CCP.

While the protesters fear extradition could be used as a weapon against political dissent, the PRC contends that Hong Kong tycoons (the city has the largest concentration of billionaires in the world,) many with substantial business links to the mainland, are not accountable for their crimes and corrupt practices in mainland China because they remain beyond the reach of the latter’s legal system.

Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Carrie Lam, entrusted with overseeing the extradition legislation, is widely perceived to be a proxy for the CPP.

The protesters, whose organization is known as the Civil Human Rights Front, occupied Hong Kong’s parliament.

The Civil Human Rights Front is basically that—a front—and not a structured social or political organization.

The protesters, mainly young, avoided forming such formal organizations in order to forestall detection or infiltration by the authorities. They preferred social media as a means of communication and mobilization.

There was a right-wing “Hong Kong First” element in the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and although weakened since then, it still has a presence in today’s protests.

Some of this “Hong Kong First” tendency goes so far as to express nostalgia for British colonial rule, over the alternative represented by the PRC.

The anti-extradition movement has succeeded so far in getting Carrie Lam to announce an indefinite suspension in the extradition law’s implementation after a march of two million people (Hong Kong has a population of seven million).
While the delay announced by Lam is clearly an attempt to stall and buy more time before a fresh attempt is made to reintroduce the extradition legislation, this foot-dragging may not be to the advantage of the protesters—to succeed, the latter need to maintain a constant momentum behind their protests, and Ms. Lam’s decision to drag out the implementation-phase of her legislation seems to be an attempt to sap this momentum.

If this is Lam’s strategy, it has failed so far, as the protests continue. In this situation, a miscalculation by either side can escalate the other’s response.

This happened last week, when dozens of men, dressed in white and wearing masks, stormed a metro station in Yuen Long, clubbing passengers with baseball bats and iron bars. Most of those hurt were demonstrators returning from an anti-government rally.

The attackers were widely believed to belong to pro-Beijing triad gangs, a suspicion confirmed for many by the fact that the police took their time in arriving when alerted to the attack, and stood around when another round of assaults took place.

Predictably, this attack precipitated further anti-government protests. The situation remains volatile, and the protests will continue, accompanied in all likelihood by increasingly harsh government responses.

Beyond thwarting what they see as the CCP’s attempt to weaken Hong Kong’s autonomy, the anti-extradition protesters have no settled political position or ideology.

Indeed, curbs on self-government, anywhere, often go hand-in-hand with a depoliticization of the general culture, so that single-issue politics becomes the most likely outlet for the collective expression of political convictions.

Both the 2014 and 2019 protests were single-issue based.

As mentioned, the 2014 demonstrations hinged on the CCP’s perceived attempt to increase its control over Hong Kong’s electoral process, and the current unrest pivots on the somewhat similar perception that the CCP wants more control over Hong Kong’s legal system.

This weddedness to a single-issue agenda is of course a weakness, as it usually is elsewhere in the world.

The forces behind the current protests have not shown much interest so far in the wider social and economic challenges facing Hong Kong. It was the same in 2014.

Apart from the young people, there is not much interest in upsetting the bigger cart in which Hong Kong’s “liberal-democratic capitalism” sits alongside the CPP’s “authoritarian capitalism,” even though the two riders may jostle each other with their elbows from time to time.

Of course contradictions exist in the configuration of this metaphorical cart: Hong Kong’s most ardent pro-Beijing supporters include a sizeable portion of its business community, who see close “connectivity” (a buzz word here) with the mainland as crucial to their continued or enhanced prosperity.

Like business communities elsewhere, the Hong Kong business elite is predisposed to valuing stability over democracy, however much lip service is paid to the latter.

A wider issue, which should concern all protest movements here, has surely to be Hong Kong’s unacceptably high level of economic inequality. Oxfam says Hong Kong’s economic inequality is at its highest in 45 years.

Citing Hong Kong’s Gini coefficient (the index measuring income distribution on a scale from zero to one), the South China Morning Post says:

“In June last year [2017] the figure for Hong Kong was 0.539, with zero indicating equality....The United States was at 0.411 and Singapore 0.4579. Hong Kong’s number has climbed 0.006 points since 2006, according to the city’s Census and Statistics Department.”
The Post article goes on to say:

“In 2016 the median monthly household income of the top ten percent of Hongkongers was 43.9 times the bottom ten percent. The poorest would have to work three years and eight months on average to earn what the richest make in a month.

“The city’s top 21 tycoons had assets collectively equaling Hong Kong’s HK$1.83 trillion fiscal reserves as of April, according to data published by Forbes. The top five tycoons earned HK$23.6 billion in dividends alone in 2016 and 2017. That amount was also never taxed as Hong Kong does not place a levy on dividends as part of efforts to maintain a ‘free economy’.”

So while Hong Kong’s GDP per capita in 2019 surpassed that of New Zealand, Spain, and Italy, its Gini coefficient ranking placed it among a cluster of African and South American countries.

While Hong Kong, by virtue of being a small island, is able to avoid some of the major pollution problems confronting the mainland, it still faces the immense challenge facing small overcrowded places, that is, the need to balance high population density with sustainable use of land that is in short supply and very highly priced on the property market as a result.

While local politicians find it convenient to blame Hong Kong’s pollution problems on the mainland’s factories, the story is more complex.

Hong Kong has the world’s highest traffic density, and its coal-fired power plants contribute an estimated 50 percent to its total pollution level.

A University of Hong Kong study showed that pollutants in Hong Kong’s air were three times higher than New York and double those of London.

Waste disposal is also a problem. Hong Kong dumps around two-thirds of its waste into landfills, and little is recycled. It is now running out of space for more landfills. Waste that used to be sent to the mainland can no longer be processed there—the PRC is not accepting such waste, even from Hong Kong.

The government’s approach to waste disposal is “too little too late,” according to critics. More funding is now being made available to local recycling facilities, and appeals have been issued to businesses and consumers to curb waste generation at its source.

A Reuters report says that “an average Hong Kong resident throws away around 1.4 kilograms daily, more than double that of Asian cities such as Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei, which have implemented extensive recycling programs.”

Hong Kong’s recycling industry, nearly all of it in the private sector, can’t even absorb the unprocessed waste now being turned-back from the mainland.

Environmentalists say the government needs to take direct control of the waste-management industry, and boost its resources massively. There is no sign of this being done.

Hong Kong protest movements concerning themselves with single issues (no matter how weighty these may be,) can give themselves a more-than-ephemeral existence by seeking to ground themselves in the deeply-rooted difficulties confronting their society—social and economic inequality, air pollution, flawed waste management, and underlying all of these, neoliberal capitalism.

The impression of many is that the authorities allow little space for substantive public and democratic discussion of these large-scale issues, let alone the implementation of measures to address them.

But this is the only way forward—no matter how fraught and complex—for protest and resistance movements all over the world (the U.S. and UK perhaps more than any other).

Hong Kong is no exception.

—CounterPunch, July 31, 2019

In June, the Costs of War Project at Brown University’s Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs released a report titled “Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Costs of War.” Echoing previous reports on the link between the U.S. military and climate change, the paper outlines the various ways in which the Pentagon is “the world’s largest institutional user of petroleum and correspondingly, the single largest producer of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world.”

While this is not necessarily news, it never hurts to have a reminder, and the paper’s detailed data on issues such as fuel usage and greenhouse gas emissions make for a shocking read and eye-catching headlines. In 2017 alone, for example, “the Pentagon’s greenhouse gas emissions were greater than the greenhouse gas emissions of entire industrialized countries such as Sweden or Denmark.”

Still, although the paper clearly links the U.S. military to climate chaos, the soft conclusion and the handling of the military industrial complex with kid gloves leaves some gaping holes in what could otherwise be a powerful commentary on intersectionality and the need for systemic change.

It is not enough to academically trace a red thread between issues. Recognizing the connections that tie climate chaos to war to imperialism to the growing refugee crisis demand solutions founded on that real-world intersectionality. We need an active solidarity that erases the demarcations of single-issue movements and builds a power that reflects the reality of our place and time. Likewise, we must be wary of soft reforms, greenwashing and capitalism’s unending affinity for shaming people.

**Climate chaos and national security**

Soft reforms are often linked with greenwashing in a sort of shot and chaser combo, made to placate the mind and ultimately uphold the status quo. Naturally, such a false solution typically comes wrapped in language that says much and means little—sounding logical without actually employing logic.

...the Pentagon is “the world’s largest institutional user of petroleum and correspondingly, the single largest producer of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the world.”

For instance, the paper concludes that “by reducing the use of greenhouse gas-emitting fuels (coupled with emission reductions in other sectors) the Pentagon would decrease its contribution to the associated climate change threats to national security.” This reminds me of those SAT sentences that used long, circular logic inanities to say essentially nothing. Basically, the Pentagon could stop creating national security threats if it stopped creating national security threats.

Furthermore, the overall conclusions made in the report push us to look at climate chaos through the lens of national security rather than the destruction of millions of species, arable land, potable water, breathable air and a livable future in general.

It is reminiscent of Senator Elizabeth Warren’s tweet in mid-May which lamented that “Climate change is real, it’s worsening by the day, and it’s undermining our military readiness. More and more, accomplishing the mission depends on our ability to continue operations in the face of floods, drought, wildfires, desertification, and extreme cold.” But by god, we must accomplish the mission! Even if that means going green!

Of course, the idea of an eco-friendly war is as ridiculous as it sounds. Our so-called national security is based on unprovoked invasions, gross human rights violations, economic warfare, regime change and overt terrorism. It is a modernized imperialism that cares just as little for people as it does for the ecosystems in which we live.

The paper does make valid and important points about reducing our reliance on oil, which includes tapering operations in the Middle East, scaling back bases and spending military budget cash on “more economically productive activities.” However, neither Senator Warren nor the Watson Institute paper dig to the root and ask whether or not the military and its violent imperialism is necessary, just whether or not it is green enough. Thereby, they miss the central paradox that in a sick cyclical death spiral, our military uses climate change and the impending destabilization as reasons to ramp up the military budget, thereby creating a self-fulfilling—and accelerating—homicidal prophecy.
One might argue that it is perfectly understandable why a paper dealing with the fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of the military is not discussing systemic change. However, conclusions are meant to analyze the preceding data, and without analyzing the overarching destructive and oppressive nature of the U.S. military, any conclusions we make within or without a report will fail to address the necessary systemic change involved in combating climate chaos.

This is the same reason why Senator Warren’s co-sponsored bill to reduce the Pentagon’s carbon footprint is a non-starter. Even if it passes, it will merely greenwash the blood soaked facade of an imperialist war machine. For instance, rather than demanding the closure of any of our almost 1,000 military bases around the world, Warren wants to make sure they are ready to withstand extreme weather.

Meanwhile, these bases that she wants to save are environmental catastrophes. Dozens of U.S. military bases are listed as Superfund Sites by the EPA, a classification used for toxic and hazardous waste dumps that are dangerously contaminated and require special cleanup. Back in 2014, Newsweek reported that “about 900 of the 1200 or so Superfund sites in America are abandoned military facilities or sites that otherwise support military needs.”

Around the world, U.S. bases leach toxic chemicals such as depleted uranium, oil, jet fuel, pesticides and defoliants like Agent Orange and lead into soil and groundwater. For years, local communities have protested U.S. bases on the grounds of cultural and environmental destruction from Okinawa to Guam to the Galapagos to the Seychelles.

Truly, the most eco-friendly thing you could do would be to close all U.S. military bases and effectively dismantle the imperialist military industrial complex as a whole. Incidentally, this would also be the biggest boost to our beloved national security, not just with regards to climate, but forced migration and displacement as well.

The intersection of our movements

While climate change is a newcomer to the national security conversation, the fear of refugees and/or immigrants tarnishing our city upon a hill is practically an American pastime. Since this settler colonialist nation was established, the U.S. has always been anti-immigrant, and that paradigm has held strong despite the fact that these days, it is directly our fault that people are migrating. Yes, irony is also as American as apple pie.

...the overall conclusions made in the report push us to look at climate chaos through the lens of national security rather than the destruction of millions of species, arable land, potable water, breathable air and a livable future in general

A recent report by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reveals that “the number of refugees worldwide is now the highest it’s ever been since the UN began keeping records, with more than 70 million people seeking refuge after being forced from their homes.” According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, “on average, 26 million people are displaced by disasters such as floods and storms every year. That’s one person forced to flee every second.”

Climate change is expected to create tens-of-millions of refugees in the coming decade. The Middle East and Africa will see perhaps the most severe effects of climate change in the coming decades—predominantly via drought and extreme heat. It is worth noting that the Middle East, Africa and South-Central Asia are not only where most of the world’s refugees are coming from, but also where most of the refugees are being hosted—yet another instance of breaking, taking and leaving disasters in our wake.

And as the War on Terror continues in the Middle East, the less discussed new scramble for Africa, AFRICOM hides imperialist jockeying for natural resources behind yet another “national security threat” lie. In short, our national security is threatened everyday by our push for national security: vis-à-vis our need to drill, spill, extract and burn which is inextricably tied to the military’s push to destabilize, destroy and displace.

Just as there is no such thing as a green war, there is likewise no way to confront climate change unless we confront the war machine, and vice versa. There is no way to confront the refugee crisis, unless we confront climate change and the war machine. In order to break that aforementioned self-fulfilling, and accelerating, homicidal prophecy, we have to look at the intersections of our movements and recognize that at these points lie our collaborative, far-reaching movements that really strike at the root—at the core of the system itself.

As an organizer, I have seen so many niche movements fall apart from overwork and exclusion. It is in fact a gift to the powers that be that we often draw such deep lines of demarcation: the environmental movement is here, the refugee and migrant rights movement is there, the antimilitarist movement is here, and never the three shall meet. But take, for instance, the recent protest in Bath, Maine where activists blocked traffic outside a naval battle-
ship construction site demanding money for climate solutions, not endless war.

At the asset management firm BlackRock’s annual shareholders meeting on May 23, a multitude of groups—from the National Indigenous Organization of Brazil to Code Pink—came together to call out BlackRock’s CEO and the entire company on their massive and grotesque investments in death and destruction via climate chaos and war. Many climate justice and direct action communities have long made these connections, literally flying the flag of anti-capitalism in solidarity with struggles around the world.

These intersectional endeavors are sources of inspiration, power and ideas. They build upon the tenets of collaboration, solidarity and respect, antitheses of the violent capitalist system. And as they crush the divide-and-conquer paradigm we too often fall for, they also highlight the inherent problems with the “personal choices” trend.

Lock, protest, sit-in, stand-up, lay down, lock down

With the rise of green capitalism (as much an oxymoron as green war), the misconception that we can save the planet by buying a tote bag or two has risen in parallel. I call it the “green me fallacy.” If everyone just recycled, if everyone just got solar panels and a reusable water bottle with Namaste written on the side. If everyone bought a Tesla.

Our so-called national security is based on unprovoked invasions, gross human rights violations, economic warfare, regime change and overt terrorism.
It is a modernized imperialism that cares just as little for people as it does for the ecosystems in which we live.

But this thinking is just another manifestation of the divide and conquer strategy of a capitalist system based on extraction and destruction. It shames people who cannot afford or have access to new technologies or green choices and further cleaves our potential at unification along the lines of greenwashed purchasing power. As neighborhoods fall to tsunamis of gentrification, eco-chic, tech trendy and hipster green industries roll in, looking down on and pushing out those who cannot afford their consumerist wares, all the while making bank and ignoring the handful of companies and the war machine that is really to blame for this worsening climate crisis.

A recent joke post on social media read: “you’d do more for the climate if you ate an oil executive than if you went vegan.” It is not only funny, but it also makes a good point. Rousseau may just have been ahead of his time in prescribing a foundation for a climate change revolution: “When the people shall have nothing more to eat, they will eat the rich…”

Sure, go vegan if you have the privilege to do so. But let us not conflate that personal choice with the actions that are necessary to dismantle the machine that profits off of animal torture.

Yes, activists will often drive to remote sites of a pipeline fight or a logging project. Yes, people will shop at Wal-Mart because they lack the financial privilege to shop elsewhere. If everyone so eager to shame folks for these choices instead would have stepped up to the front lines of a pipeline fight, dirty energy would have thousands to contend with, rather than a handful of inestimably strong-willed activists.

When people say “everyone can do something,” I agree. But a mere commitment to recycling is not it. Sure, because some 91 percent of plastic is not recycled, I still think we should work to institute better waste management practices and demand recycling facilities. We should use public transportation whenever we can. We should also brush our teeth regularly, not drink too much alcohol and avoid processed foods.

In other words, the so-called greening of your personal life should not be viewed as acting for the climate. It should be viewed as another facet of being an adult in today’s world. Acting for the climate, that “something” that everyone can do should actually mean acting for the climate. It should mean that you block, protest, sit-in, stand-up, lay down, lock down or in some way lend your time, energy, body and mind to a pointed systemic struggle. It should mean organizing in your community to draw connections between our various issues—from gentrification to imperialism to food sovereignty to public health to systemic racism, all of which are linked to climate chaos.

It should mean targeting the system rather than each other, decoupling our power from our green purchasing power and not turning the class war in on ourselves. It should mean educating
and engaging on the foundations of anti-oppression, anti-imperialism, and anti-capitalism. It should mean dreaming and doing and building communities and networks that exist outside the confines of the capitalist system we all suffer under.

There’s no definitive blueprint for this work. True solidarity and real intersectionality means reaching outside of our comfort zones and stepping into spaces we do not know, in ways that go beyond theory. Environmentalists will need to address the climate chaos inherent in a racist, imperialist war machine. Anti-war activists will need to consider the importance of climate justice in their work.

Folks most impacted will not only need a seat at the table but will need real solidarity and respect for their life experiences. We will all need to look sharply at the dangers of entertaining false solutions from on high, green-washing, and the shaming of those who do what they have to in order to survive. As we reach across the divide, and conquer the narrative of our own future, we will have to learn to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, to go beyond the prescribed progress of a regressive system.

It seems daunting, it feels impossible—but we are not alone, unless we choose to be.

—ROAR, July 5, 2019
https://roarmag.org/essays/there-is-no-such-thing-as-a-green-war/

### Youth and Workers Unite Behind Climate Crisis

**German labor union urges two million members to join Global Climate Strike**

**BY JAKE JOHNSON**

Germany’s second-largest service sector labor union, Verdi, on Monday urged its two million members to join the youth-led “Fridays for Future” climate strikes scheduled to take place next month in over 150 countries across the globe.

“We can only protect the climate together,” tweeted Verdi, a service sector union.

As the *Associated Press* reported, “Verdi head Frank Bsirske told the WAZ newspaper on Monday he was calling on the union’s two million members to take part.”

“Whoever can should march and participate,” said Bsirske in a tweet. “Anyway, I’ll be going.”

Organizers of the strikes, which are set to kick off September 20 and continue through September 27, said they expect millions of people to participate around the world.

According to the *Global Climate Strike* website, the event is on track to be the largest ever “global mobilization against climate breakdown.”

Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish environmentalist whose activism was an inspiration for the upcoming strikes, applauded Verdi for joining the global movement for climate justice.

“This is leadership,” Thunberg tweeted. “Who will follow? The world is watching.”

German climate activist Luisa Neubauer also celebrated Verdi’s move and called on other unions to follow its lead.

“This is incredible,” tweeted Neubauer. “This is youth and workers uniting behind this crisis. Which union will join next?”

As *Common Dreams* reported in July, the September climate strike is set to take place as world leaders gather for the United Nations Summit on Climate Change in New York.

“It is time for world leaders to wake up to the truth of the climate crisis,” organizers of the strike said in a statement last month. “By demonstrating people’s power we will make this week a turning point in history. The climate crisis is an emergency. We have to act like it so we will stop our business as usual and show governments what people want: climate justice.”

“This September,” the activists added, “millions of us will walk out of homes and workplaces onto the streets and demand an end to the age of fossil fuels.”

—*Common Dreams*, August 6, 2019
Lost In the System

BY MAHMUD KHABIR AL-MATIN

The system, which I attempt to discuss, is familiar. The name of this system varies from mouth to mouth in casual conversation, or heated debates. Some call it Gulags, others call it the Prison Industrial Complex, others the human warehouse.

I agree with all these names including those in the numerous books that have surfaced in the last two decades about mass incarceration. This system as we know it holds 2.5 million people including some they refuse to let go regardless of rehabilitation, programming certifications, college, and ignorant youthful mistakes. I am one of those 2.5 million.

On June 4, 2019 after having served 31 years of my life (in which I’ve turned 18 in Union County Jail in Elizabeth, New Jersey.) I was transferred to Rikers Island where I turned 19 and was sentenced to 25 years to life in 1991 in New York. I was finally granted parole after being denied four times. I convinced the Commissioners by the grace of Allah that I was no longer that easily influenced teenager.

I was no longer a threat to society. I was a college graduate twice. I was in school working on a degree at Ulster Community College through Hudson Link Prison Education Program funded by Mr. Warren Buffett and his sister Doris, and many other famous people. (See HudsonLink.org website.) I was a teacher’s aide helping men whose reading level was below fifth-grade, as well as math. I was the Imam’s clerk and taught Arabic. I had numerous letters from staff supporting my release. Some staff were retaliated against for such belief and reprimanded, although New York DOCCS rules state that staff should write these reports. I am the author of an urban novel entitled Can’t Stop the Grind and a book of poetry entitled From the Mind of the Incarcerated Slave that has yet to be published. I gave speeches in the prison grassroots events regularly.

I had become a father and a husband. I had written articles about “the system,” the comrade brother Rashid who was the codefendant of Assata Shakur and Abdul Majid (Anthony Laborde) who was placed in solitary confinement with me on two separate occasions. Once was in Wende Correctional Facility, and the last before his death in Elmira, for organizing and other false charges. I had also written articles in the Bay View on the death of Hugo Pinell and how it was our obligation to adopt his daughter as our sister, daughter, and niece.

However, on June 4, 2019, the day when billions of Muslims are celebrating the end of Ramadan, I was waiting in the cell to go home. My family and I had been told there were no warrants or detainers, no reason for my further incarceration. My brothers had catered a beautiful meal for the evening for me, daughters and sons-in-law to partake, after the evening prayer. I was dressed in full Islamic attire—full-length prayer robe and Kufi. Instead of my waist-cuffed. I was told I would not be allowed to wear a black Kufi and my attire was confiscated as I was given a tan uniform. I was given one phone call to let everyone know what happened. I had not seen any judge and within 48 hours I was zoomed off at 5:00 A.M. to Trenton State Prison, which sent me to Central Reception Assignment Facility (CRAF) butt naked in a jumpsuit and flip-flops. I was issued #550844, an old number and simply told I would see Classification. This is 31 years later. My family was not allowed to speak to me for a week. Upon seeing Classification, I was told I owed time—16 years with a five-year stipulation. The Classification Committee removed six years from the back of the sentence and gave me an early parole date of November 2023 plus 202 jail credit days. This was my punishment for getting a reversal in 1994 and being re-sentenced, which in the original judgment of conviction showed there were 256 Gap time days plus 202 jail credit and another eight months missing.

The judge has since died and a motion has been filed to amend the judgment of conviction to reflect 1014 days are owed to me on the front of the sentence and 1059 on the back which under State v. Hernandez, State v. Beatty and State v. Rippy, I am entitled to every day. This time would put me at an immediate Parole Board to be advocate on Prison Radio’s “Voices Beyond the Wall” on WKBR 91.3 Radio was crushed. My wife has not gotten back on the radio because she can’t speak without breaking down.

I was placed in a filthy bullpen with walls smeared with all types of disgusting substances while foot-shackled and waist-cuffed. I was told I would not be allowed to wear a black Kufi and my attire was confiscated as I was given a tan uniform. I was given one phone call to let everyone know what happened. I had not seen any judge and within 48 hours I was zoomed off at 5:00 A.M. to Trenton State Prison, which sent me to Central Reception Assignment Facility (CRAF) butt naked in a jumpsuit and flip-flops. I was issued #550844, an old number and simply told I would see Classification. This is 31 years later. My family was not allowed to speak to me for a week. Upon seeing Classification, I was told I owed time—16 years with a five-year stipulation. The Classification Committee removed six years from the back of the sentence and gave me an early parole date of November 2023 plus 202 jail credit days. This was my punishment for getting a reversal in 1994 and being re-sentenced, which in the original judgment of conviction showed there were 256 Gap time days plus 202 jail credit and another eight months missing.

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Kevin Cooper’s name has been in the papers in recent weeks, as it has been on and off for 35 years. This time, it was because Kim Kardashian visited him in prison, part of her advocacy for those she believes were wrongly convicted.

Cooper was sentenced to death for the hacking murders of Douglas and Peggy Ryen, their ten-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old neighbor. The Ryens’ eight-year-old son, Josh, survived his throat being slashed.

A reality show star is among Cooper’s best hopes for exoneration, and the media is generally focusing not on the case, but on backlash against her. These are only the two most recent examples of how Cooper’s case exemplifies so much that is wrong with our system. Since his 1983 arrest, Cooper’s treatment has exposed one systemic failure after another.

Cooper describes his childhood as abusive and troubled. His first involvement with the system was at age seven, after he ran away from his adoptive family to escape beatings. He turned to shoplifting and marijuana use, ending up in juvenile detention. In his mid-20s, Cooper was sentenced to four years for burglary, but he wasn’t sent to an ordinary prison. He was sent to the California Institution for Men, in Chino, which, despite the conformist name, was founded in 1941 as an experiment in prison reform. It was built to alleviate overcrowding, violence, and oppression in California’s other prisons, which newspapers described as “powder kegs ready to explode.”

The man hired to imagine this new system was Kenyon J. Scudder, a veteran penologist who had ideas for how to improve the prison system he saw as archaic and inhumane. Under Scudder, the institution, nicknamed Chino, was rooted in the idea that “prisoners are people,” and it sought to treat those incarcerated with dignity.

Chino’s first class of 34 prisoners included those with convictions for minor offenses along with those who were convicted for violent crimes. Chino didn’t use terms like “warden” or “guards.” Scudder was the “superintendent,” and his guards were “supervisors,” mostly college-educated people who had never before worked in prisons. This was to avoid any punitive mindsets. Scudder de-emphasized security and weapons, and trained his staff in conflict resolution. Prisoners chose their own clothing and their own jobs. Their cells were not locked, and instead of a 25-foot wall with gun towers, as was suggested, Scudder built only a five-strand barbed-wire fence. He encouraged loved ones to visit, permitting physical contact, and he refused to segregate on racial lines. Today, this kind of prison would be considered a quixotic dream.

“For a brief period of time, it seemed that other prisons around the world would follow Chino’s lead,” writes Emily Nagisa Keen and Dana Walters of the Human Rights Program at Harvard Law School. “In the early 1950s, prison experts at the International Penal and Penitentiary Congress agreed that open prisons should eventually replace traditional cell-based prisons for nearly all types of prisoners.” In 1955, a United Nations resolution echoed the sentiment. But Chino eventually morphed into a traditional maximum-security prison. Several factors doomed Scudder’s vision, all part of the tough-on-crime movement, but one high-profile escape was particularly damaging to the model: In 1983, Kevin Cooper walked out of the prison a day after arriving.
and was soon the lead suspect in four gruesome murders.

**A prison pattern**

It makes no sense—morally, financially, or logically—to ignore the good of any given endeavor because one person abused it. But what happened in Chino is part of a pattern wherein politicians act cowardly and walk away from progressive and promising models, usually at the expense of the least enfranchised.

The system was not done exposing its worst in Cooper’s case. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote an exhaustive and devastating column detailing the evidence indicating that Cooper was framed by law enforcement for the murders. “In 1983, four people were murdered in a home in Chino Hills, California,” he begins. “The sole survivor of the attack said three white intruders had committed the murders. Then a woman told the police that her boyfriend, a white convicted murderer, was probably involved, and she gave deputies his bloody coveralls. So here’s what sheriff’s deputies did: They threw away the bloody coveralls and arrested a young Black man named Kevin Cooper.”

As in so many cases, Cooper’s trial was, to put it mildly, racially charged. One man brought a noose around a stuffed gorilla to a hearing. According to Cooper’s current lawyer, “he didn’t have a half-decent defense.” The crime was high profile and law enforcement was under pressure to punish someone. Kristof dispatches with the evidence against Cooper by exposing law enforcement negligence, such as when the district attorney shut down the on-scene investigation “for fear, he said, of gathering so much evidence that defense experts could spin complicated theories.” Kristof also exposes probable lies, like when a deputy suspected of planting evidence claimed not to have entered the room where the evidence was found, but his fingerprints were found there. Various judges have concluded that Cooper was framed. Kristof notes that the bloody coveralls were not the only evidence pointing to a different culprit, but it was all ignored.

Cooper also faced politicians who cared more about saving face than saving the life of a possibly innocent person. Kamala Harris, as district attorney of California, refused to permit advanced DNA testing that could have exonerated Cooper. It was only after Kristof’s column was widely shared, and Harris was no longer in a position to help, that she reversed her position. Former Governor Jerry Brown waited until the very end of his term to finally order new DNA testing, but, as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, he “inexplicably stopped short of ordering all the testing needed.” Shortly after Gavin Newsom took office as governor, he ordered additional DNA testing. The results are pending.

Not everyone caught in the criminal legal system prompts backsliding on reform, and not everyone is hit with high-profile murder charges. Not everyone is framed. And very few have Kim Kardashian fighting for them. But plenty of people have been railroaded because of their race, their class, or their education. And plenty of people have been disbelieved because law enforcement says otherwise, regardless of how implausible the police story is. Plenty have faced arbitrary refusals of those in power to get to the truth. And a tremendous number have suffered because politicians rolled back reforms after isolated incidents of abuse. Cooper understands all this.

“I don’t have any confidence,” he told Kristof. “I don’t believe in the system.” Cooper believes that the criminal legal system is unfair to poor people and non-white people. “I’m frameable, because I’m an uneducated black man in America,” he said. “Sometimes it’s race, and sometimes it’s class.” He is writing a memoir. “That’s my motivating factor to get out of here, to tell my story and tell the truth about this rotten-ass system,” he said.

—*The Appeal*, June 20, 1029

Class war prisoner, Freedom fighter, Man of the People, long held political prisoner, Thomas William Manning, died on July 30, of a heart issue at the federal penitentiary in Hazelton, Kentucky.

Tom—Tommy to his many comrades, family, friends, people who knew him, was a life long Revolutionary Freedom Fighter. From the early ’70s, Tom was a public activist and organizer and later, a quite successful armed militant in the anti-imperialist underground. Captured in 1985, he and some of his comrades became known as the “Ohio 7/UFF“ (United Freedom Front) defendants.

After many trials Tom was hit with 58 plus 80 year sentences. He was then thrown into some of the worst, harshest prisons in the United States. Being in captivity did not stop Tom from continuing to work and struggle for justice, freedom, human rights and the socialist and environmentally sustainable future so many people and our planet so need. Tom struggled against abuses inside prisons and continued to work for the independence struggles in Puerto Rico and Ireland, the Palestinian struggle and the then still ongoing anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In fact Tom was very likely one of the two last anti-apartheid activists still in captivity anywhere in the world. Tom of course always continued to support the struggles of poor and working people in this country, the struggles of Black people, Native rights and land struggles, against police abuses and murders of civilians, people of color in particular.

Tom was an artist, and accomplished painter. His artwork truly captures some of Tom’s essence: his portrayal of the dignity of working people, children, women, the strength and determination of the revolutionary fighters and leaders, and more. A beautiful book of some of Tom’s art was published in 2014 — For Love and Liberty: Artist Tom Manning, Freedom Fighter, Political Prisoner.

Now Tom is gone. Our comrade, my comrade, who suffered years of medical neglect and medical abuse in the federal prison system — your struggle and suffering is now over brother. But your example, your words, deeds, even your art, lives on. You truly were a “Boston Irish rebel,” a life long man of and for the people, a warrior, a person of compassion motivated by hope for the future and love for the common people, a Revolutionary Freedom Fighter.

We miss you and love you comrade...and we will carry on the struggle!

Jaan Laaman, Ohio 7/Anti-imperialist political prisoner (Black), August 2, 2019
Tom Manning: A Short Biography

Tom Manning was a freedom fighter, political prisoner and prolific artist. His paintings are stories that jump off the page, revealing the outlook of people who struggle for liberation around the world. His book (now out of print) contains over 80 full-color paintings that were made between 1996 and 2005. Political Prisoner Tom Manning died in captivity July 31, 2019, at the age of 73.

“...Revolution is never begun anew, only continued where others left off...” — Tom Manning

Boston born and raised in a large, Irish working class family—never enough money though. My father worked day and night—with sleep in between. His only days off were when he was hurt or some crisis in the family. A longshoreman and a postal clerk—he worked himself to death trying to get one end to meet the other. He never did make ends meet—that would be a cycle and capitalism is not made that way—he always got the worst end.

As kids we tried to help where we could. I shined shoes and sold newspapers in the subways and the bars, otherwise I spent my time like most kids in the neighborhood roaming the docks and freight yards looking for anything that could be converted into cash, bartered, or used in some way. Also playing stickball and raising pigeons. As I grew older, I worked as a stock boy, then construction laborer until joining the military in ’63; Cuba in ’64; Vietnam in ’65-66.

Back on the streets for a minute, then state prison for five years—armed robbery and assault and battery. Given the area where I grew up and being a ’Nam vet, prison was par for the course. I ran into a lot of boyhood friends and veterans inside. I became somewhat politicized in prison, taking part in food and work strikes, being around people willing to teach and organize at great personal risk. I spent my last 14 months in Walpole’s 10 Block, where I first read Ché, and where all the prisoners—Black, Brown, and white—were united out of necessity—in contrast to general population in the prison and in the city of Boston.

I completed my sentence in May of ’71— took one quick tour of the old streets, and headed for the country, the woods, and small towns of Northern New England, where I met Carol, married, and had a child, the first of three. Jeremy, Tamara, and Jonathan. The second two came during our ten years underground. In Portland, Maine we became active in a prisoner’s rights organization named SCAR, whose work was done by and for prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their loved ones.

The work was rapidly expanding into all areas of the community, finding jobs and housing for people coming out, trying to stay out, support and welfare advocacy transportation to the prisons for visiting, childcare, organizing young people, a bail fund, a book store.

With this work and the study it required, it became increasingly clear who got the best end, at whose expense, and what was needed also became clear—socialism—a system where ends meet. The bosses oppose this system with a vengeance. They attack it with their armies and police. The People must fight for their own system in all ways—one of these being armed clandestine struggle. We have a long way to go, but we are getting there.

I was captured in 1985, sentenced to 58 years in federal prison for a series of bombings carried out as armed propaganda against apartheid in South Africa, U.S. imperialism in Latin and Central America, including a concerted campaign against Mobil Oil and U.S. military targets in solidarity with the FALN’s (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional—English: Armed Forces of National Liberation) campaign for the release of the five Nationalist prisoners—and, against racist, genocidal capitalism here in the belly of the beast. I’m also sentenced to 80 years—two 25 to life, plus 20 for armed robbery, plus ten for escape—in New Jersey for the self-defense killing of a state trooper.

At present I am at the U.S penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas where I am classified as a high max prisoner restricted to a high accountability status (orange card) that requires me to be checked in every two hours during the daytime and evening hours. I am forced to work in the prison print shop, which has a higher security than any other job shop. And if I refuse or get fired from this job, I’ll be returned to the hole.

This is the first prison I’ve been held in where I can walk around un-handcuffed and un-shackled. The prison authorities, because of my political beliefs and affiliations, have declared me a “threat to the secure and orderly running” of their prison system. As a result, I have spent the last 12 years in continual lockdown, from the control unit in New Jersey to U.S.P. Marion in Illinois, and ADX Super-max in Florence, Colorado.

I stand accused of being a part of the Sam Melville/Jonathan Jackson unit in the 1970s and the United Freedom Front in the 1980’s. I am proud of the association and all that it implies...

—Tom Manning: A Short Biography, 1999

Solitary Confinement in Immigration Detention

By Abram Wolfe

Last month, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), in conjunction with The Intercept, NBC News, and Univision, published the results of an extensive investigation into the use of solitary confinement in American immigration detention facilities. The report, which reviewed 8,488 recorded stays in solitary confinement between 2012 and early 2017, found that solitary was used “to punish immigrants for offenses as minor as consensual kissing and to segregate hunger strikers, LGBTQ detainees and people with disabilities.” More than half of all solitary stays covered in the report lasted longer than 15 days.

Nearly one-third of the stints in solitary involved someone with a mental illness, and 373 involved someone on suicide watch, resulting in “a revolving door between solitary confinement and medical isolation cells for people deemed at high risk of trying to hurt themselves.” This “revolving door” is reminiscent of the cycle of solitary confinement for people with mental illness that exists within prisons and jails throughout the United States.

At a time when Trump’s brutal policies have drawn attention to conditions in immigration detention, these alarming findings help confirm what advocates have long suspected, and amplify what incarcerated immigrants have long experienced: Solitary confinement is overused and abused by immigration authorities, and the unique position of migrants in detention can render them especially powerless to resist or endure their torturous conditions.

Growth of immigrant incarceration

The solitary confinement of immigrants, of course, would not exist without their incarceration. And although immigration laws and deportation have always been a reality in the United States, the arrest and detention of immigrants during deportation proceedings is a contemporary phenomenon. From America’s founding through the 1880s, the fledgling nation operated with an open borders doctrine. Even after the United States began to set limits on the swell of newcomers, including the strict (and racist) quotas established by the Immigration Act of 1924, the detention of migrants was never “a significant or even active component of immigration enforcement,” writes immigrant rights attorney and legal scholar Anita Sinha.

But in 2002, as a response to the attacks on September 11, 2001, Congress passed legislation consolidating previously disparate immigration functions into one agency, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). At the urging of both private prison companies and the new Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) unit of the DHS, Congress quietly began adding immigration detention bed quotas into its annual budgets, guaranteeing that a minimum mandatory number of beds would be maintained exclusively for those undergoing immigration proceedings. Meanwhile, just as the federal government began preparing a vast infrastructure for immigration detention, the criminal prosecution of immigration offenses ballooned, creating a robust pipeline meant to shuttle individuals through a process of arrest, possible deportation, and, in the meantime, indefinite incarceration.

While statistics on immigration detention before 9/11 are scarce, one government report stated that in 1995, the U.S. immigration system incarcerated an average of fewer than 7,500 people. Immigration detention nearly quadrupled over the following two decades: According to DHS’s annual budget, ICE facilities held, on average, 28,449 individuals by 2015. This far outpaced the rate of growth of non-immigration-related incarceration, which went up 37 percent over the same period. And while U.S. prison and jail populations have leveled out and declined since about 2008, immigration-related incarceration only continues to rise: According to the same DHS budget report, by the end of 2018, ICE held a daily average of 42,188 people in detention facilities spread across all 50 states, throughout local jails, and in holding facilities on the border. DHS projects that by the end of 2020, that average will swell to 54,000. Those estimations are likely to be met, if not exceeded, given Trump’s recent call to deport “millions” from within immigrant communities.

Every one of these tens-of-thousands in ICE custody is civilly, not criminally, detained. According to its own policies, ICE’s detention network exists solely to hold individuals for “custodial supervision,” meaning ICE’s carceral practices serve a strictly logistical role. In no manner does the law instruct ICE or DHS to carry out punishment against people for any crimes. In practice, however, the detention of American immigrants increasingly resembles the punitive incarceration of America’s convicted prison population, including forced work practices, heavily restrictive living environments, and, of course, solitary confinement.

Like most prison systems, ICE does not officially recognize its own use of solitary confinement, nor do the private companies like CoreCivic that run many of its detention facilities. Instead, official ICE detention practices make use of what it calls Special Management Units (SMUs), in which individuals...
can be placed under one of two pretexts. The first, Administrative Segregation, is purportedly “nonpunitive,” and is “required only to ensure the safety of detainees or others, the protection of property, or the security or good order of the facility.” The second, Disciplinary Segregation—which in theory requires a review and hearings by the Institutional Disciplinary Panel—is imposed for rule violations ranging from homicide and inciting a riot, to “horseplay,” engaging in sexual acts, refusing to work, or displaying insolence towards staff. Despite these purported differences, the two types of segregation often involve identical cells and living conditions.

Navigating the world of solitary confinement in ICE facilities is made further complicated by the fact that different facilities operate under different detention standards, as demonstrated by ICE data from 2015. This can mean that what is treated as benign in one facility might land, or keep, an individual in solitary in another.

“The lack of the uniformity in the standards is a real serious problem in ensuring that people are treated humanely, that there are clear standards, that conditions are adequately monitored, and that the standards are enforced in an appropriate way,” Victoria López, a senior staff attorney at the ACLU’s National Prison Project who specializes in immigration detention, told Solitary Watch. “In the last ten to fifteen years, with this massive growth of the immigration detention system, what we’ve seen is that ICE has been able to patch together different kinds of contracts with local governments and private prison companies, utilizing varying sets of standards depending on, frankly, what seems most convenient to the jail or the prison operation and not really consistent with how people should be treated.”

In 2013, a time when scrutiny and criticism of solitary confinement was growing in the United States, ICE attempted to modernize its solitary practices through a wide-reaching directive. Intended to improve “the safety, health, and welfare of detainees in segregated housing,” the directive required lengthy, meticulous documentation before anyone could be placed in restrictive housing. However, López explained that the reforms set up only “very basic limitations” that “raise their own red flags.” A scathing internal report released late last year showed that these reforms were aspirational at best, with many ICE facilities in violation of them. Among other violations, the report alleged that one man was put in extended solitary confinement for “sharing coffee with another detainee.”

...in 1995, the U.S. immigration system incarcerated an average of fewer than 7,500 people. Immigration detention nearly quadrupled over the following two decades: According to DHS’s annual budget, ICE facilities held, on average, 28,449 individuals by 2015

Suffering and dying in solitary

Other than that internal report, there exist almost no publicly available government reports regarding the solitary confinement of people in ICE custody. It has largely been left to advocacy organizations and investigative news outlets like ICJI to uncover the reality of life inside American immigration detention facilities. This task is made difficult by the scarcity of reliable information, and the thick regulations surrounding any sort of data gathering. The recent ICJI report recognizes that its dataset was limited by ICE restrictions, allowing for analysis of only the “portion of all isolation stays in ICE facilities” that ICE chose to make public.

What has resulted, says the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), which was the first to produce a report on the subject in 2012, is a climate in which “advocates have very little information regarding the use of segregation in detention facilities. Most of what is known about segregation in these facilities comes from anecdotal reports from current and former detainees and the attorneys and advocates who work in detention centers.” Those anecdotal reports are critical, growing in number, and paint a dire picture of the state of solitary confinement in American immigration detention facilities.

Tiombe Kimana Carlos was 34 when she committed suicide after spending two-and-a-half-years in York County Prison (YCP) in Pennsylvania, which holds both pre-trial detained immigrants and American citizens convicted of criminal offenses. According to a 2017 report from Human Rights Watch, Carlos spent a cumulative nine months of that time in solitary, including the last 78 days of her life. She was described by her lawyer as “sweet and gentle, but also gregarious and fun to be around,” and had persistent mental health issues present from an early age. Her death report explains that “disruptive behavior on the bus that transported her to YCP” led officers to place her immediately into a behavior-based Administrative Segregation unit, despite the fact that “an administrative segregation order was not completed for or issued to Carlos.” For the following two-and-a-half-years, she filed grievances that went unacknowledged, attempted suicide five times, and
received little mental health treatment. Before her final stretch in solitary, her lawyer said, “She was telling her fellow inmates that she couldn’t take it anymore. Then, at one point, she gave away her stuff and she says, ‘I’m going to go.’”

The small number of internal ICE death reports that are publicly available through FOIA (34 in all, found here under the tab “Reports”) show a high prevalence of both prolonged solitary confinement and suicide, often in combination. Similar patterns can be found in recent reporting by journalists and advocates on deaths in immigration detention.

At Stewart Detention Center, for example, JeanCarlo Jimenez Joseph hanged himself in 2017 after being placed in solitary confinement, reportedly as punishment for an earlier suicide attempt. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation found that Jimenez Joseph, who had a history of schizophrenia, had “repeatedly displayed suicidal behavior, but never got the mental healthcare he needed. He was also placed in an isolation cell that contained a known suicide hazard, a ceiling sprinkler head, upon which he affixed his makeshift noose.” CoreCivic seems to have learned little from his death in its custody: Just a year later, Efrain Romero de la Rosa, who had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, killed himself after three weeks in solitary confinement at Stewart.

At least one suicide in solitary can be directly linked to Donald Trump’s family separation policy: In May of 2018, Marco Antonio Muñoz “lost his shit,” as one Border Patrol Agent described it, when agents forcibly took his three-year-old son from his arms. When the distraught Muñoz “yelled and kicked” while in custody, he was taken to a local jail and placed in a padded isolation cell, where he was found dead the next morning with “a piece of clothing twisted around his neck.”

Those who survive solitary confinement in detention recall confusion, horror, and a sense of existential helplessness. “It was like somebody was choking me,” 50-year-old Ayo Oyakhire recounted to Splinter. Oyakhire described the apathy of facility staff in response to his distress during his 45-day stay in solitary: “Take your medicine, go back to sleep,” they reportedly told him.

Even immigrant children who arrive in the United States as unaccompanied minors are sometimes subjected to solitary confinement. A recent lawsuit filed on behalf of immigrant teens with “mental health and behavioral issues” who were held at Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Virginia relays stories of children held in prolonged isolation in small cells, and strapped to restraint chairs in their underwear with bags over their heads. In response, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice reviewed the practices at Shenandoah Valley, ultimately finding that “no abuse or neglect had taken place.” Governor Ralph Northam praised the report as “quick and comprehensive.” The lawsuit is still pending.

Invisible spaces and invisible lives

Solitary confinement in the criminal justice system is a hidden world. In the system that incarcerates immigrants, it is even more opaque, due in part to a high level of privatization. In 2015, 62 percent of all immigration detention beds were operated by private companies under contract with ICE, compared with eight percent of the beds in criminal prisons and jails, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

This arrangement places a staggering proportion of detained immigrants in an especially dangerous climate. When it comes to conditions of confinement, including the use of solitary confinement, private facilities are permitted to bypass many of the already meager standards for documentation, transparency, and accountability required of public facilities.

For example, because courts have found that “documents created and maintained by a private entity are not ‘agency records’ subject to FOIA’s disclosure requirements...Prison documents related to confinement conditions can be kept from the public simply by not handing them over to DHS officials,” writes law professor César Chuauhtémoc García Hernández. These loopholes create what he has called “invisible spaces and invisible lives in immigration detention.” The bureaucratic confusion and chaos created by having some detained immigrants housed in local jails and state and federal prisons only adds to the invisibility.

ICE’s inability to adequately oversee detention operations in county jails and private prisons can result in the grave overuse of solitary confinement, Victoria López explained to Solitary Watch. As non-citizens, and often non-English-speakers, living under constant threat of deportation to countries where their lives may be at risk, detained immigrants are unentitled or unable to legally challenge their conditions, including their placement in isolation. As the NIJC report explains, “guards have unfettered power over immigrants, who have no legal recourse for unfair custody decisions,” and who have little ability to make their cases known to the outside world.

Not even twenty years ago, the situation our country finds itself in today would have been unthinkable. The incarceration of detained immigrant populations was relatively rare, and the solitary confinement of those populations even more so. Today, however, members of the public, reporters, and even legislators wanting to exert oversight are often denied access to ICE facilities. ICE’s increasing secrecy coincides with dangerous overcrowd-
The dizzying rush to lock up more and more immigrants of all ages and circumstances in increasingly punitive conditions has been further fueled by the hateful anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies of the Trump era, leaving tens-of-thousands of vulnerable men, women, and especially children in increasingly dire positions. Using solitary confinement as a tool for coercion and intimidation only inflames these traumas, turning an inherently administrative process into a punitive, dangerous environment. And yet ICE continues to evade any meaningful oversight, drawing a tight curtain around internal conditions of inhumane confinement.

Innocence: Is It Enough?

By Charles “Joe” Gilyard

If you were to ask me that question 36 years ago, more than likely I would have answered, “Sure, why not? However, if you were to ask that same question today, I will definitely respond with a resounding “NO!” I’ve been pleading my innocence for over 36 years. I have had the proof of my innocence for 36 years, and yet I am imprisoned.

If I had a story to tell, I don’t think it would be unique or different from many others that you have read or heard about. Someone spending countless years in prison for crime(s) they are innocent of, and God forbid hearing or witnessing a person being murdered by the state and later found to be innocent of the crime he/she was put to death for. There are far too many situations like these, but if you’re not a “celebrity” or of wealth your situation is placed on the back pages of the newspapers, and spoken of softly on the TV and the radio if at all.

Prisoners like me, we get no air-time! Why, you ask? Because from day two, I became a number, not a person, not a human being, not someone who had rights, not someone innocent until proven guilty—just a number, AY-3679. I get no mail without the number. I get no visits without the number. When I’m asked to identify myself, I must give that number, before I say my name, as a matter of fact after giving my number, my name doesn’t even register, after a lifetime (50 years) of training. I have become Inmate AY-3679.

People like you, who have never experienced this may say, “Don’t let your circumstances define who you were, nor what you have become.” But I ask? Who am I? At 57 years of age, I’ve spent 50 years of my life being a prisoner. My innocence was lost, or shall I say taken way long before I knew what it meant. I was given to the system by my mother when I was just seven years old, sent to a “child’s prison” called Southern Homes for Boys in Philadelphia, and that’s when my “training” began as just a number. So tell me again, who am I? My appeal to you is not about the child that was given to the system, but about the young man still an adolescent who was taken away by the system and sentenced to life imprisonment for crime(s) that he never committed. It’s about a 57 year old man who wants a chance to live life outside of prison walls. I am not requesting a second chance, because I never had a chance to begin with.

November 18, 1982, I was walking down the street with a friend. An undercover police pulls up, and says there is a warrant for my arrest. At that point I had no idea why there was a warrant out for me. I was handcuffed, taken to 8th and Race Street—better known as “Homicide Division.” Once there, Detective Frank Ansel, screaming and yelling that I was a, “Psycho Son of Bitch,” and “You Kill babies and Old Men,” accosted me! I was beyond shocked at these accusations, but never the less, I adamantly denied killing anyone. I was then told that I was being “charged” with a murder and robbery of an elderly man, Mr. David Johnson (85 years old). Truth is, I had absolutely no idea what was going on because I’ve never killed anyone, I was told that the victim lived in Richard Allen Homes with which I was familiar, because I had lived there for a few months with Mona Moore, the mother of our daughter, Shonda. The last time I was there was on November 3, 1982. On that date Mona and I had a terrible fight (physical,) so I started thinking, “Why would fighting with

by the end of 2018, ICE held a daily average of 42,188 people in detention facilities spread across all 50 states, throughout local jails, and in holding facilities on the border. DHS projects that by the end of 2020, that average will swell to 54,000.
Mona have me at the Homicide Division? I know I did not kill her.” I was then informed that on November 4, 1982, Mona called the police (actually the detectives that were investigating the crime) and said, “I have some additional information concerning the murder of David Johnson. Joe and my brother Derrick robbed and killed that old man.”

Because of that second statement by Mona, there was a warrant taken out for my arrest and I was charged with the crimes.

On February 14th or 15th of 1984, I was convicted of first-degree murder, robbery, and criminal conspiracy. The evidence used against me at the trial was (1) Mona’s testimony, which is “Joe told me that him (Joe) and my brother (Derrick) robbed some guy and that Derrick killed the man.” (2) Detective Frank Ansel took the stand and said that I told him that Derrick and I robbed this man and that Derrick killed him. Actually, Detective Ansel didn’t really testify, he read the jury a statement/confession that he said he got from me. When Detective Ansel was questioned about this statement/confession, his response was that “Joe never saw the statement/confession. Joe never signed the statement/confession, Joe never adopted the statement/confession, and that the statement/confession was not verbatim.” He then said that he wrote the statement/confession 12 hours after Joe was taken from the police station and moved to the detention center. That’s it! Based solely on the above evidence, I was given a life sentence.

As I mentioned at the start of this appeal, I’ve had proof of my innocence for 35 years. It’s true because from the very start, I told the police that “I was working at the time of this crime,” yet it did not become an “official alibi” until one year after my being imprisoned. Let’s start with that: The crime happened on October 4, 1982 between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M. in North Philadelphia. During those hours I was working in West Philadelphia. My employer and co-workers were willing to testify on my behalf (PROOF). Eight days after the crime (October 12, 1982) Mona was taken into custody by the investigating officers, and asked why her name was on the check of the victim (David Johnson.) Her response was “that her brother Derrick gave her the check and that it already had a signature on it, and that her brother probably had stolen it from somebody, and that he was alone when he gave her the check.” (Mona’s first statement.)

Four months after my arrest Derrick J. Moore was arrested in Baltimore, Maryland for unrelated charges. Mr. Moore immediately confessed to the murder and robbery of David Johnson. After being extradited back from Baltimore to Philadelphia, he makes another confession that it was him and his sister Mona who committed the crime against David Johnson, and that “Joe was not involved at all!” (PROOF)

Six months after my arrest, Mona Moore makes her third statement. In that statement she says, “I know that Joe had nothing to do with the crime I accused him of being involved, because I know that Joe was at work at the time the crime was committed, I lied on Joe because I was angry. I told my best friend, Jackie McDuffie, that I was going to lie on Joe before I did it. So on November 4, 1982 I called the cops and implicated Joe in the robbery and murder of David Johnson”

Six months after my arrest Derrick J. Moore writes a third confession to the District Attorney’s office, the Judge of the court, and the attorney that was representing him, and the attorney that was representing me. He stated again, “Joe Gilyard is innocent of the crimes he is being charged for, he was not involved, please call me to court so I can tell you this face-to-face. I, Derrick Moore, killed David Johnson, my sister Mona set him up to be robbed and it (the robbery) went wrong.”

All of these people, Assistant District Attorney Rodger King, Honorable Lisa Richett, Andrew Gay, who was representing Derrick, Richard Michaelson, who was representing me at the time, Frank Shannon who was a private investigator hired by my lawyer and took the third statement from Mona, and finally Jackie McDuffie were all witnesses to my innocence, including Derrick Moore himself, (PROOF) Yes! I have all the sworn affidavits, and all the statements made by these people as PROOF. No! None of this was ever used at my trial, my alibi was never presented as such and none of the witnesses were ever called to testify.

So I ask again, is innocence enough? You tell me!

Write to Joe:
Smart Communications/PA DOC
Charles “Joe” Gilyard #AY-3679
SCI Rockview
P.O. Box 33028
St. Petersburg, FL 33733
Dozens of community activists traveled hundreds of miles from four states to Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, on July 24, 2019 to deliver petitions signed by 3,000 people from around the world, simply requesting the right to proper vision care for political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. They expected at the very least that someone with authority in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections would step out to accept the petitions.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections instead placed several burly Capitol District cops and a couple of DOC staff members outside the front doors to “greet” the community representatives.

The activists fighting for Abu-Jamal’s freedom—representing a global movement for the freedom of all political prisoners—insisted on their right to speak to John Wetzel, head of the state prison authority or one of his near-equals, before handing over the signatures from thousands of Mumia supporters.

**Agreement to meet**

Outside the main doors of the state facility, the first of two non-uniformed men to speak to the activists was a Mr. Barnacle. When Pam Africa, representing the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal, asked who he was, he pulled out a badge marked “staff,” dated 2018. When told someone with real authority and current identification was needed, Barnacle eventually agreed to allow three participants to enter the building to deliver the petitions to a DOC official.

While the assembled activists waited to be joined by people in two additional vehicles from New York City, Megan Malachi, from REAL Justice, read the petition to the press titled “Act Now to Save Mumia’s Eyesight and to Demand His Release.”

Aminata Sandra Calhoun, from Mobilization4Mumia, followed with a statement from Mumia’s medical proxy, Reverend Mark Taylor, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, serving presently as Mumia’s “spiritual advisor.” The statement read in part:

“So far, the prison officials are discouraging and making complicated the eye-doctor’s ability to share with me the medical information that Mumia wants me to have. They have not scheduled his surgery. Every cooperative effort on these matters is being made by Mumia’s family and friends; still there is too much stalling by prison officials.

“We insist that SCI-Mahanoy and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections honor every legal step that Mumia needs to be taken, so that he receives quality eye-care immediately. He must no longer be subject to medical neglect or to any withholding of full information about his medical condition.

“The abuse Mumia suffered in the past nearly killed him, and even when finally addressed left him with cirrhosis of the liver. There is time for Pennsylvania officials to turn a new corner.”

Abu-Jamal has a lot of trouble reading and doing other tasks that require good eyesight. His eyesight is seriously threatened by glaucoma, a vitreous detachment and cataracts in both eyes. These jeopardize his quality of life and wellbeing, as well as his journalistic profession.

The ophthalmologist whom Abu-Jamal was taken to see outside Mahanoy Prison recommends surgical procedures to remove the cataracts on both eyes.

But months of delays echo the years of delays Abu-Jamal experienced before the DOC was finally forced by a federal court to treat him with the cure for hepatitis C in 2018.

**DOC reneges on agreement**

When three designated activists—Dr. Suzanne Ross, Reverend Keith Collins and a videographer—later tried...
to enter the DOC state headquarters, they were met by another DOC staff member, Ken Smith, who claimed he was a Major in “Special Operations,” but would not show any valid identification to that effect.

Smith then reneged on the earlier agreement and said he would take the petitions, but would not allow the representatives to enter the building and meet with a DOC official.

The activists were unbending in their demand that a valid DOC person of authority formally accept, “on the record,” the inch-thick bundle at a location inside the building.

Dr. Ross, designated as one of the petition delivery trio, told Smith: “The DOC has already failed from 2015 to 2017 to make available to Mumia the cure that was available for hepatitis C at that time. The two-year delay left Mumia with cirrhosis of the liver [and other hepatitis C-related damage]. Mumia supporters are determined to prevent the damage that could be caused by a comparable delay in treating his visual problems. ...We’ve been here before and met with people. One time it was with the head of the press office. Send us the press officer.”

Reverend Keith Collins, who visited Mumia on July 4 and was also appointed to deliver the petitions, said: “I’m a pastor, a decorated veteran, a para-trooper, also an ex-cop....We just want to deliver these petitions. ...Mumia told me he can see to get around but not to read and that’s very important—for a journalist to read and to study....So we’re here...to get him access to the doctor...and to let him come home. He’s served forty years for a crime he did not commit.”

Despite arguing for over an hour, the activists could not get the DOC to relent. Because of the commotion and locked doors, when a FedEx worker tried to deliver a package, no one on the outside would sign for it, and he was told to come back another time.

Yet the DOC wanted petitions from 3,000 people to be handed over to undesignated staff, off the record, with no way of tracking the petitions, which could immediately be trashed.

Finally, Abu-Jamal’s supporters marched away, but not before Pam Africa said: “We’re leaving now, but it’s not over. Wetzel, we’re going to find out wherever you be at, cause there ain’t no power like the power of the people.” The group left chanting, with the petitions in Reverend Collins’ hands, undelivered.

Legal struggle continues

The DOC’s refusal to meet with community representatives comes less than a week after the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower-court decision that Corrections Department employees could be sued for their decisions regarding the 65-year-old Mumia. Abu-Jamal asserts his initial denial of treatment with two antiviral drugs for hepatitis C violated his constitutional right to be free from cruel and unusual punishment. In an unprecedented January 2017 decision, Federal District Court Judge Robert Mariani used that argument to order the DOC to treat Abu-Jamal with direct-acting antiviral medications for his infection.

Abu-Jamal’s supporters argue that because deliberate delay resulted in Mumia’s cirrhosis of the liver and because the current delay in cataract surgery may cause further deterioration in his overall health, he should immediately be released to seek treatment that the DOC refuses to make readily available to him.

Abu-Jamal is not alone in enduring these cruel and unusual assaults on his health. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the number of state prisoners age 55 or older increased 400 percent between 1993 and 2013. Across the nation elderly prisoners experience a torturous journey toward the end of their lives, suffering from life-threaten-
The news came through like a beam in the night: “Eddie Africa has been released today.”

Eddie Africa, after over 40 years in Pennsylvania State and U.S. Federal prisons, was home.

The news radiated like heat from a noonday summer sun and men smiled to see their grandchildren for the first time.

Forty years is far more than 40 years if your name is Eddie Africa. That’s because MOVE people face the fury of county and state officials, and that meant a kind of cruelty that most prisoners have never seen nor imagined.

He has survived beatings while handcuffed, and at least one attempt to castrate him.

He has been struck by weapons that have ruptured his abdominal wall.

And lest we forget, he has been held in prison for over 40 years, despite evidence of his and other MOVE members’ innocence of any crime in connection with the MOVE confrontation of August 8th, 1978.

That said, Eddie Africa is beloved among prisoners for his positive spirit and his eccentric sense of humor.

Now, Eddie Africa is with his loving family, at home.

—Prison Radio, June 23, 2019

Dear Editors,

As of 2017, more than half-a-million U.S. children have lead poisoning.1 For over 2,000 years humanity has documented the poisonous effects of lead. It is a preventable environmental toxin that has no biological role in the human body. Lead causes irreversible brain damage especially in children. Presently the law does not require testing of all children for dangerous lead levels. Compare this to PKU (Phenylketonuria).

PKU is a genetic disorder that causes irreversible brain damage. It can be found in one in 10,000 white newborns and one in 50,000 Black newborns. In 1963 a blood test for PKU was developed. Just a few years later in the late 1960s, mandatory universal screening became the law. (A special diet could prevent brain damage.)

Lead poisoning causes irreversible brain damage. It can be found in one in 40 children, and Black children have the highest lead poisoning risk. In 1976 a blood test for lead was developed. (A life free of lead can prevent brain damage.) Today in 2019, over 40 years later, there is still no mandatory universal lead screening law in the U.S.

The USPSTF (The U.S. Preventative Service Task Forces), in its 2019 report to Congress stated: “the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for elevated blood levels.” The potential harms of trying to help more than half-a-million children who are disproportionately Black, are listed by the USPSTF as: cost and possible side effects of treatment for severe lead poisoning.2

In 2012 the CDC (Center for Disease Control) stated that there is no safe level of lead in children’s blood. What did the great believers in family values, the politicians in Congress, do with this information? In 2012 Congress cut the CDC lead program budget by $27 million.

“Requiring industries to prove that chemicals are not toxic before they are put on the market or emitted by polluting industries is the only way to protect children.”3
We need a political economy that does just that. The economic system we have now puts profit over people. It’s time for change.

Dr. Nayvin Gordon, July 5, 2019

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

3 https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/2/e20171400

Dear Editors,

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continues to expose women to toxic breast implants knowing that safe alternatives are available. Two types of breast implants have been available since the 1980s: textured and smooth. Some ten million women have had these implants.

In 1997 the first case of cancer associated with textured implants was reported. In 2011 a Medical Device Alert was published about the risks of textured implants and cancer. By 2016 the World Health Organization (WHO) designated a new cancer associated with only textured implants.¹

By February 1, 2017 the FDA knew of at least 359 cases of cancer and nine deaths, all associated with textured implants and no cases associated with smooth implants. On May 3, 2019 the New York Times article titled, “F.D.A. Won’t Ban Sales of Textured Breast Implants Linked to Cancer,”² reported over 600 cancer cases and over 20 deaths due to textured implants, which are now banned in many countries, yet the FDA “will not prohibit its sale in the U.S.” Knowing that smooth implants are safe, the FDA says “the risk from textured breast implants linked to a cancer of the immune system, was too low to justify action.”

Let us look closely at what the FDA is saying. The risk of cancer and death for millions of women does not justify action to ban the sale and production of a toxic product.

In other words—the profits for a billion dollar pharmaceutical company is more important than the needs of millions of women. Knowingly making profits from the bodies of maimed and murdered innocent women is the quintessence of this economic system.

We should ask ourselves, could the needs of the people and the planet power society rather than profits? Would the vast majority live healthier lives? Is it time to take another road?

—Dr. Nayvin Gordon, July 23, 2019

1 https://academic.oup.com/asjopenforum/article/1/1/ojz003/5366232
2 https://academic.oup.com/asjopenforum/article/1/1/ojz003/5366232

Dear Editors,

The British government paid out £20,000,000 to compensate—not the newly freed slaves—but the 3,000 families that had owned slaves, for their loss of property. Equivalent to £16.6 billion today, which became invested in English factories, Irish farms and plantations in India.

How is it that government can pay reparations to those who directly profited off slavery, but not even attempt to repair the relationship to the ones who’s ancestors were exploited in bondage and still live under the thumb of oppressive racism in the form of white supremacy? The U.S. Civil Rights Movement and this version of “equality” was fought for to-the-death by many, and we still don’t have acknowledgment that this country is, was, built on stolen land by kidnapped, enslaved African people—all in the name of commerce.

Now we live in this illusion of freedom and sold a dream of the pursuit of happiness. In a time where slavery is being edited from the school books because no one wants to be reminded, yet the same tactics like racism, sexism, and poverty are being used to divide, conquer and control us so that the true minority—the capitalist ruling class—can continue to siphon wealth out of the working class into bank accounts that already have more money than can ever be spent by a family in ten lifetimes.

Those of us who are aware, have the responsibility to our children and generations to come, to continue fighting against this system that doesn’t have our interest at heart—this system that doesn’t have a heart. And to teach the full history so that our children are compelled to change today in the interest of tomorrow.

Stop telling kids that money is the most important thing to have, stop lying to our future. It’s like being in active drug addiction, turning our own children out and teaching them that drugs are the most important things to have. Sounds crazy right? I bet no adult in his or her right mind would do such a thing. But this capitalist system is just another manifestation of the character defects of humanity like ego, greed, selfishness intolerance and indifference. But, just like an addict can recover from drugs, so can today’s society begin to recover from capitalism—the ultimate manifestation of the collective character defects of humanity. We can recover. We do recover.

—John Gould, July 17, 2019
The Socialist Manifesto: The Case for Radical Politics in an Era of Extreme Inequality

By Bhaskar Sunkara
Basic Books
www.basicbooks.com

Writing in the preface to the 1888 English edition of the Communist Manifesto, Frederick Engels explained why he and Marx did not call their pamphlet the “Socialist Manifesto.” According to Engels, socialism was identified with utopian dreamers and reformers “who wanted to eliminate social abuses through their various universal panaceas and all kinds of patchwork, without hurting capital and profit in the least.” In contrast to socialists, communists were considered dangerous to the ruling class since they stood for working-class revolution and the “radical reconstruction of society” that would end all exploitation and oppression. In other words, Marx and Engels were completely justified in shying away from this “socialism.” Perhaps not realizing this, Bhaskar Sunkara, founder and editor of Jacobin Magazine and a prominent member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has written The Socialist Manifesto as a primer on the history of socialism and how we can achieve it today.

In capitalist society, the state, especially the military, remains an instrument of class domination that must be smashed by the organized and armed working class.

Sunkara’s proposed socialist strategy is a democratic one conducted primarily through elections. A great deal of the book is spent discussing historical examples of socialists who have undertaken this road, such as the social democratic parties that made up the Second International. In discussing the early socialist parties, such as the German Social Democratic Party, Sunkara locates the key tension between their vision, which hoped for a radical transformation of society and winning immediate reforms. Sunkara says that social democracy’s strategy of incremental reform appeared sound since winning these increased party membership and led to greater votes on election day. Furthermore, social democratic party officials and bureaucrats had a vested interest in reforms, because they now possessed vested interests in the existing order that would be jeopardized if there was a revolution. The end result of this strategy was social democracy’s betrayal of internationalist principles and support for the slaughter of the First World War.

Sunkara argues that what happened in 1914 was not the inevitable result of reformism; it could have been avoided with “institutional measures” to make the party bureaucracy more accountable to the rank-and-file. However, The Socialist Manifesto avoids any serious discussion of the root causes of the Second International’s degeneration, such as imperialism, the conservative role of the labor aristocracy, and the abandonment of Marxist theory in favor of “practical results.” As a result, Sunkara avoids seriously examining difficult and uncomfortable questions about his strategy.

Sweden

In looking to positive examples of democratic socialism, Sunkara spends a great deal of time on post-1945 Swedish social democracy, which he claims was “the most humane social system ever constructed.” The Socialist Manifesto claims that Sweden went further than any social democracy in directly attacking capitalism when it attempted to implement the Meidner Plan in the mid-1970s. The Meidner Plan proposed the gradual socialization of the Swedish economy through compelling corporations to continually issue new stock that would then be transferred to workers’ funds controlled by Swedish labor unions.
Gradually the unions, and by extension their members, would gain control of the nation’s means of production. However, the Plan was watered down when it was eventually introduced, and capital ultimately defeated it altogether. Sunkara says that the failure of the Meidner Plan reveals the main dilemmas of social democracy, which relies upon winning elections and delivering results, economic expansion, and partnership with capitalists willing to compromise on major reforms. All of this means that social democracy’s reforms are precarious and in danger of being rolled back. Despite this, Sunkara maintains that “the road to a socialism beyond capitalism goes through the struggle for reforms and social democracy, that it is not a different path altogether.”

Still, this raises the question of how can democratic socialists avoid the failures of Sweden and other social democratic endeavors. Sunkara offers a number of remedies. For one, he recognizes that once social democrats are elected, they will face the same challenges and pressures as their predecessors, since passing reforms require maintaining business confidence and profits. As Sunkara notes, social democrats for the most part have been willing to cave into business pressure and abandon their reform programs. His solution is for extra-parliamentary movements to hold reformers’ feet to the fire (a somewhat weary and shopworn mantra of social democrats) in order to force capital to make concessions. Sunkara says that a serious democratic socialist experiment must understand that the capitalist class will “do everything to stop us” through capital strikes and withholding investment.

Chile

Even though Sunkara says “history matters,” he ignores the history, which disproves his democratic socialist strategy, namely the Chilean road to socialism. The election of Salvador Allende in 1970 on the program of a parliamentary road to socialism represented a far more radical endeavor than the Meidner Plan. It included nationalization of copper mines owned by powerful U.S. corporations, land expropriations and redistribution, and nationalization of banks, among other policies. In line with Sunkara’s strategy, Allende’s government won at the ballot box and was supported by popular and radical movements in the streets, and support for Allende’s party even increased in the off-year elections. Ultimately, the Chilean road to socialism failed. It was undermined by capital strikes, sabotage from American imperialism, and, finally, its violent overthrow by the military coup of 1973.

it is necessary to smash the bourgeois state along with its police, army, and the whole repressive apparatus, and replace it with instruments of popular power in order to suppress the resistance of the capitalist class and open the way to socialism

The failure of Salvador Allende proves a simple truth that Sunkara refuses to recognize—the nature of power. In capitalist society, the state, especially the military, remains an instrument of class domination that must be smashed by the organized and armed working class. If the power and privileges of the capitalist class are threatened in a substantial way, as they were in Chile, capital will respond with brutal force no matter how “legal” and “peaceful” socialists are. Ultimately, the peaceful road is not peaceful at all, but results in a bloodbath for the unarmed working class in the face of capitalist resistance. Therefore, it is necessary to smash the bourgeois state along with its police, army, and the whole repressive apparatus, and replace it with instruments of popular power in order to suppress the resistance of the capitalist class and open the way to socialism. Nothing The Socialist Manifesto proposes confronts this reality; rather Sunkara’s program only paves the way to future defeats.

The Socialist Manifesto does not limit its discussion of history to social democracy. It also looks at revolutionary experiments in Russia and the third world. Despite his rejection of the revolutionary road, Sunkara does not condemn the Russian Revolution outright. Rather, he spends many pages challenging the crude anticommunist narrative of 1917 and the notion that Leninism simply led to Stalinist totalitarianism. Sunkara emphasizes that Lenin’s revolutionary strategy did not lead to Stalinism; it was, in fact, based on orthodox social democracy: “But it wasn’t a blueprint for a radically different party; rather, these were tactics needed for a movement barred from the legal organizing and Parliamentary work pursued by its counterparts elsewhere. Once tsarism was overthrown, backward Russia and its small working class could develop along Western lines and push the struggle further.” The Bolshevik’s social democratic origins meant that they were a lively and democratic party rooted in the working class. This changed with the outbreak of World War One and the revolutions of 1917 when the Bolsheviks broke with social democracy and seized power. Still, Sunkara rejects the simple narrative that the Bolsheviks staged a coup in 1917. Instead, he argues that while it was “certainly not as spontaneous as the February Revolution, October represented a genuine popular revolution led by industrial workers, allied with elements of the peasantry.”

After taking power, the Bolsheviks, according to Sunkara, struggled to build a new order while facing eco-
economic breakdown, foreign intervention, and civil war. This unprecedented situation led Lenin to centralize power and resort to red terror in a desperate struggle against counterrevolutionaries. While Sunkara does not believe red terror was inherent in Bolshevism, he does fault Lenin for squelching democracy and open debate in Russia.

In contrast to other democratic socialists, Sunkara does not casually dismiss the Russian Revolution as totalitarian from the beginning. Rather, he wants to remember the grandeur, power, and heroic vision of 1917. And yet, The Socialist Manifesto sees no other outcome for the Bolsheviks other than Stalinism because “materially, Russia wasn’t ripe for socialism.” Sunkara believes that due to the unfavorable objective circumstances and the fact that they had no other model to rely upon, the Bolsheviks had no real options, but he concludes that their model, which was “built from errors and excesses, forged in the worst of conditions, came to be synonymous with the socialist ideal itself.” He sees no alternative path offered by any of the other Bolsheviks. Trotsky himself is acknowledged as “Stalinism’s greatest critic” but one who “couldn’t admit that any part of the system he so despised had its genesis in the early repression that he himself had helped engineer...” As a result, the emergence of Stalinism as a “horrid totalitarian regime unlike any the world had ever seen” was the inevitable, albeit tragic outcome, of Russian backwardness. In the last instance, Sunkara’s remembrance for 1917 is that of tragedy, with the attitude that its revolutionary ideas have no relevance for today.

Revolutions in China, Cuba, and Vietnam fare little better in Sunkara’s estimation. He acknowledges that it was Leninism, not social democracy, that appealed to the third world since it emphasized anti-imperialism and the needs of the peasant majority. Following the argument of DSA founder Michael Harrington, Sunkara argues that because the third world lacked the preconditions of socialism, Marxists were forced to rely upon “substitute proletariats” such as peasants in order to lay the foundation of capitalist modernity. As a result, the Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese revolutions came from above and “ruled over and on behalf of the oppressed, not through them.” However, Steve Cushion’s A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerillas’ Victory shows, contrary to Sunkara’s claim, that there was working class involvement throughout the course of the Cuban Revolution and it cannot be reduced to a revolution from above. There is no consideration of the possibility of peasants as revolutionary subjects, which would require a far deeper engagement with the dynamics of the Chinese, Cuban, and Vietnamese Revolutions than Sunkara is prepared to do. Rather, The Socialist Manifesto concludes that third world revolutions vindicate the claim that socialism requires an advanced productive base in order to prevail, otherwise the result is authoritarian collectivism.

Sanders consistently supports and funds imperialist wars and apartheid Israel and does not advocate a socialist program, but one of New Deal liberalism, as he himself has recently admitted.

Permanent revolution
This argument is premised on a rigid stagist reading of Marx’s work, not to mention a serious misreading of history. That is something Marx himself rejected in his later writings on the Russian commune. There, Marx was far more open to the possibilities of socialist revolution in underdeveloped countries as opposed to the necessity of all nations following the historical path laid out by Western Europe. And for someone schooled in Trotsky’s writings, Sunkara does not even discuss his theory of permanent revolution, which argued that revolution could occur in the capitalist periphery before the center. Trotsky argued emphatically against a simple stagist path: “To imagine that the dictatorship of the proletariat is in some way automatically dependent on the technical development and resources of a country is a prejudice of ‘economic’ materialism simplified to absurdity. This point of view has nothing in common with Marxism.” The revolutions in the third world confirmed the theory of permanent revolution, since the masses in the third world did not wait idly by with folded arms for the development of capitalism. Rather, they carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution and went further by taking the socialist road. And despite the mistakes, limitations, and setbacks of revolutions in China, Cuba, and Vietnam, they did more to advance the cause of socialism than the social democracies of Western Europe, which all made their peace with imperialism.

Based on his understanding of history, what concretely does Sunkara propose for American socialists? He argues that socialists must take account of the particular American conditions, namely the two-party system, that make forming an independent socialist party so difficult. While not rejecting the formation of a socialist party as a distant goal, Sunkara believes it is necessary to operate inside the Democratic Party for the foreseeable future. Unlike Michael Harrington, Sunkara does not consider realigning the Democrats to be a realistic strategy. Rather, he says that due to the loose nature of the Democrats they are vulnerable to “the
electoral equivalent of a guerrilla insurgency.” He points to the example of Bernie Sanders and his 2016 election campaign that fought against the Democratic Party machine: “Sanders believed that the path to reform was through confrontation with elites…. [He] gave American socialism a lifeline by returning it to its roots: class struggle and a class base.” For Sunkara, Bernie Sanders represented a real alternative program and his campaign created a new political constituency of “Berniecrats” who are fighting against inequality. The Socialist Manifesto argues that socialists must build upon the Sanders’ campaign by constructing their own alternative narrative in order to win elections and pass sweeping reforms.

Sunkara’s argument downplays the power of the Democratic Party and its ability to co-opt social movements and present itself as a party of the people while serving the interests of liberal capitalism. Furthermore, his argument that Bernie Sanders represented a watershed moment in American politics is based on myth-making and ignoring his actual record. While it may have been the case that Sanders was a “class struggle social democrat” in his youth, that has not been the case for many decades. As Murray Bookchin and Alexander Cockburn have observed, Sanders is very much a career politician and a Democrat in all but name. Sanders consistently supports and funds imperialist wars and apartheid Israel and does not advocate a socialist program, but one of New Deal liberalism, as he himself has recently admitted. In contrast to Sunkara, socialists must recognize the limitations of Sanders and the Democratic Party and clearly demarcate ourselves by creating independent organizations and presenting a revolutionary alternative.

It is to Bhaskar Sunkara’s credit that The Socialist Manifesto is an easy read. No doubt, Sunkara’s work will appeal to a wide audience, especially those who want a primer on the ideas and strategy of democratic socialism. However, a real discussion on socialism begins with the acknowledgement that it has not been democratic socialism, but only revolutionary communism that has breached the walls of capitalism. That means a sober look on the organizations, methods, and means necessary to make that revolution a possibility, not repeating the failed strategies of reformism. This is something The Socialist Manifesto does not do, meaning that it provides little value to understanding what is needed to achieve socialism.

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Socialist Viewpoint is printed by members of Local 583, Allied Printing Trades Council, San Francisco, California.

Note to Readers:

Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by revolutionaries who share a common political outlook stemming from the old Socialist Workers Party of James P. Cannon, and Socialist Action from 1984 through 1999.

After being expelled from Socialist Action in 1999, we formed Socialist Workers Organization in an attempt to carry on the project of building a nucleus of a revolutionary party true to the historic teachings and program of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

What we have found is that our numbers are insufficient for this crucial project of party building. This problem is not ours alone; it is a problem flowing from the division and fragmentation that has plagued the revolutionary movement in capitalist America and the world since the 1980s.

What we intend to do is to continue to promote the idea of building a revolutionary Marxist working class political party through the pages of Socialist Viewpoint magazine. We continue to have an optimistic outlook about the revolutionary potential of the world working class to rule society in its own name—socialism. We are optimistic that the working class, united across borders, and acting in its own class interests can solve the devastating crises of war, poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction that capitalism is responsible for.

We expect that revolutionaries from many different organizations, traditions, and backgrounds will respond to the opportunities that will arise, as workers resist the attacks of the capitalist system and government, to build a new revolutionary political party. Just as we join with others to build every response to war and oppression, we look forward to joining with others in the most important work of building a new mass revolutionary socialist workers’ party as it becomes possible to do so.
Chelsea Manning Can Remain in Jail for Another Year, Judge Rules

By Del Cameron

Chelsea Manning, a former Army intelligence analyst-turned-whistleblower, may remain behind bars for up to another year and face nearly a half-million-dollars in fines over her ongoing refusal to testify before a grand jury about her disclosure of classified information to WikiLeaks.

A federal judge in the Eastern District of Virginia on Monday, August 5, 2019, denied a motion filed by Manning’s lawyers for a hearing requested to press the court to reconsider its sanctions, which include jail time—not to exceed 18 months—and financial penalties that may ultimately total around $441,000.

“I am disappointed but not at all surprised. The government and the judge must know by now that this doesn’t change my position one bit,” Manning said in a statement to Gizmodo.

Manning, 31, was taken into custody in early March after declining to answer questions before a grand jury concerning her past association with WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy organization founded by Julian Assange, who is currently battling extradition to the U.S.

Assange faces an 18-count indictment, issued by the U.S. Justice Department this May, including alleged violations of the Espionage Act for publishing classified information that Manning provided in 2010—including thousands of secret diplomatic cables and battlefield reports—while she served as an Army intelligence analyst in Iraq.

Manning has stated that she has a moral objection to testifying before the grand jury and that no amount of jail time will compel her to testify. Legally, she can only be imprisoned as part of an effort by the court to coerce her into testifying. Her time in jail is not supposed to be punitive.

Her attorneys argue that she’s shown her resolve is unwavering, and that the sanctions are ineffective. Thus, her time in jail cannot be considered coercive, an attempt to compel her testimony. U.S. District Judge Anthony Trenga, however, says he’s convinced otherwise. On Monday, he denied Manning’s attorneys the opportunity to further argue their case before the court.

“In support of the Motion, Ms. Manning has proffered a substantial number of financial records detailing her assets, liabilities, and current future earnings,” he wrote. “The Court has reviewed these records and concludes, based on the evidence proffered, that Ms. Manning has the ability to comply with the Court’s financial sanctions or will have the ability after her release from confinement.”

Trenga added that “based upon the nature and volume of documents,” a hearing “would not aid the decisional process.”

Manning’s attorneys said the judge’s decision was “unexpected,” that she is currently “deeply in debt,” and cannot work while incarcerated. Therefore, they argued, she cannot afford the fines that may ultimately be imposed.

“Chelsea will remain confined for another year, and will face ongoing financial hardship, unless Judge Trenga or a higher court are convinced of what Ms. Manning has always publicly maintained: that the sanctions imposed will never coerce her compliance and therefore are entirely punitive,” her legal team said.

It remains unclear as to what information U.S. prosecutors hope to attain from Manning’s testimony. Her interactions with WikiLeaks were all detailed during her court-martial six years ago, and logs of her conversations with Assange are already public record.

The continued existence of the WikiLeaks grand jury itself remains a mystery given the scope of the charges already brought against Assange. No evidence presented during any previous hearings, nor any publicly available to date, suggest that Manning had interactions with anyone other than Assange himself.

While Manning’s imprisonment for civil contempt may not exceed 18 months, she could be released earlier, if the grand jury is dismissed beforehand.

—Gizmodo, August 7, 2019

Write to:
Chelsea Elizabeth Manning #A0181426
William G. Truesdale Adult Detention Center
2001 Mill Road
Alexandria, VA 22314
Activists about to leave for prison headquarters in Mechanicsburg, Penn., on July 24 say, “Accept our petitions! Free Mumia!” Read Prison Officials Turn Away Thousands of Petitions for Mumia on page 66.

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

On the Front Cover: Protest against ICE July 13, 2019, Chicago. Read Solitary Confinement in Immigration Detention, on page 61. (Photo: Antwon McMullen, Shutterstock)

A critical look at The Socialist Manifesto. Read Democratic Socialist Cul-de-sac on page 70.


Attention Prison Mail Room:

Prisoners retain their free speech rights under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. That means you cannot legally suppress the expression and consideration of ideas. Prison walls do not form a barrier separating prisoners from the protection of the Constitution, according to the Turner v. Safley ruling. [482 U.S. 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987)] If you exclude printed matter on an improper basis, or give a false pretext or rationale for its exclusion, because of the ideas expressed in it, you are breaking the law. The prisoner denied access to material 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.”