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

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While most of us think of schools as a social good, in the history of some people, that has not been the case. Among Canada’s indigenous people, those we have come to call “Indians,” schools have become a place of pain, sorrow, and loss. For the better part of a century these schools called residential schools were where indigenous children came to be whipped, punished, and traumatized for the sin of not being white. First run by the government, by the Roman Catholic church, these schools became a site of horror, torture, and death. Recently, the ground surrounding the residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia revealed the graves of over 200 indigenous children.

Subsequent searches have found hundreds of other children around so-called “residential schools.” I recently read a book by native leader, George Manuel, 1921-1989, entitled “The Fourth World” published in 1974, who wrote of his school years in the following way:

“Three things stand out in my mind, hunger, speaking English, and being called a heathen because of my grandfather. On the day we arrived at the school each new boy was assigned an interpreter who was a senior student. All the teachers were monks or devout lay Catholics. We call them brothers. In my first meeting with brothers, he showed me a long black leather strap and told me through my interpreter ‘If you are ever caught speaking Indian, this is what you will get across your hands.’”

—Manuel, 1963-64, Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada a site of genocide schools.

With the dramatic fall of Kabul, through the forces of the Taliban, the alligator tears of the political class are falling, decrying the costs of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

What has been thoroughly forgotten, however, is the unprecedented mass protests of February 2003, before the war began. When the earth shook with anti-war fervor in countries across the globe.

Then president George W. Bush would ignore these protests as a mere “focus group,” his words, “focus.”

In the 2004 book, *The Citizens of the Empire*, author and critic, Robert Jensen recounted, “the worldwide actions on February 15th, 2003, were the single largest political demonstration in history.”

Millions of people all over the globe poured into the streets to try to derail the Bush administration’s mad rush to war.

How, in an alleged democracy, can the government so easily ignore the views of millions? It happened and chaos came to Afghanistan, and wreaked havoc for over 20 years. What if the protest had won? We will never know.

—Prison Radio, August 17, 2021

https://www.prisonradio.org/commentary/tears-of-empire

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Capitalism’s Never-ending Wars

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

Capitalism wages wars against people in many ways—by military and police occupation and violence—but also by environmental catastrophe brought about by wanton disregard of the effects of for-profit production methods that have caused global warming, poisoned the oceans, land and air we breathe, and threaten the very existence of life on Earth.

Just in the last several weeks—from the U.S. drone strikes in Somalia, and Afghanistan, to Brazil’s police violence targeting its Black citizens, to U.S. businesses placing their poisonous industries in the poorest communities here in the U.S., and around the world—it is clear the commanders of capital will stop at nothing to control the world’s resources.

To accomplish this, they must exploit working people—both as cheap labor and as cannon fodder—to continue to fill their coffers with untold wealth.

Military wars

A July 20, 2021 New York Times article by Eric Schmitt and Declan Walsh titled, “U.S. Military Conducts a Drone Strike Against Shabab Fighters in Somalia,” reveals the real purpose of the U.S. drone strikes:

“The United States conducted a drone strike against Shabab militants in Somalia on Tuesday... ‘...U.S. forces were conducting a remote advise-and-assist mission in support of designated Somali partner forces.’ ... The Somalis and Kenyans are at odds over several issues, including ownership of a triangle of oil-rich waters in the Indian Ocean.”

This has been the impetus for the U.S. wars on Iraq and Afghanistan and throughout the world. Control of the world’s resources by any means necessary, including war—has been the modus operandi of the U.S. commanders of capital since its inception.

Since the very first European stepped foot on this continent, the capitalist class has succeeded in tipping the economic scales in their favor through violence, extermination, and occupation.

Police wars

In an August 15, 2021 New York Times article by César Muñoz Acebes titled, “From Rio, a Cautionary Tale on Police Violence,” reveals how Brazil’s police force copies the racist U.S. police force by promoting racism and targeting its Black population:

“Black Brazilians are almost three times as likely to be killed by the police as white Brazilians are. Last year, according to the Brazilian Forum for Public Security, the police killed 6,416 people countrywide. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, one of Brazil’s most violent, 1,245 died at the hands of the police alone. ... When it comes to the use of lethal force by the police, there are, in effect, two sets of rules: one in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods to shoot only in self-defense and one in poor communities to shoot first and ask questions later.”

The U.S. has had economic relations with Brazil since 1822. And more recently, “According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the United States had invested $68.34 billion in Brazil as of 2017.”

The U.S. cares nothing about Brazil’s President Jair Bolsonaro’s brutal treatment of people of color and the poor, or his selling-off of the environmentally crucial Amazon rainforest to the highest bidder.

The U.S. cares about their business interests in Brazil. What Bolsonaro does is just “business as usual” to the U.S. capitalist class.

War on the environment in the U.S.

An August 16, 2021 New York Times Op-Ed by Margaret Renkl titled, “Everyone Will Breathe This Polluted Air One Day,” describes an oil pipeline to be placed under an aquifer for drinking water—as just one example of racist industrial pollution-for-profit. In truth, it is widespread:

“The Byhalia Connection pipeline was to be a joint venture by Plains All American Pipeline and Valero Energy. As The Commercial Appeal in Memphis reported in March, Plains All America was already plagued by environmental problems, including a major oil spill on the California coast in 2015. Meanwhile, closer to Memphis, a leak of crude oil and benzene—a known carcinogen—occurred in 2020 near the place where the proposed pipeline was set to join an existing storage site. Despite these companies’ terrible safety records, the proposed pipeline, which was first announced in December 2019, would have been routed directly beneath a fragile sand aquifer that supplies much of the drinking water in Shelby County, Tennessee, where Memphis is. Adding insult to injury were the strong-arm tactics that pipeline representatives employed against holdout neighbors in Boxtown, which was established by formerly enslaved people shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation. When residents refused to sell family land for the pittance they were offered, the companies sued for rights to the property under eminent
domain…”There’s the stench of sewage in a historically Black neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky. The proposed grain elevator would turn a historically Black community in Louisiana into an industrial complex. The natural gas facility in Virginia that would aid the extension of an oil pipeline through a historically Black community in Pittsylvania County. The creosote contamination in a historically Black neighborhood in Houston. The toxic coal ash moved from a predominately white community in Tennessee and dumped in a predominately Black community in Alabama.”

The capitalists care nothing about the people living in these dilapidated, impoverished communities that they poison. It’s simply a matter of the fact that the land is cheaper there, so they can make more profits by putting their poisons, refineries, pipelines, and processing plants, etc. in those communities.

**U.S. war on the environment throughout the world**

As if it’s not bad enough that U.S. industry, led by the military industrial complex, which is the most polluting in the U.S., they spread and concentrate polluting industries and poisons in the poorest parts of the world.

In fact, in a 2019 *Guardian* article by Erin McCormick, Bennett Murray, Carmela Fonbuena, Leonie Kijewski, Gökçe Saraçoğlu, Jamie Fullerton, Alastair Gee and Charlotte Simmonds titled, “Where does your plastic go? Global investigation reveals America’s dirty secret:”

“A team of *Guardian* reporters in 11 countries has found: Last year, the equivalent of 68,000 shipping containers of American plastic recycling were exported from the U.S. to developing countries that mismanage more than 70 percent of their own plastic waste. The newest hotspots for handling U.S. plastic recycling are some of the world’s poorest countries, including Bangladesh, Laos, Ethiopia and Senegal, offering cheap labor and limited environmental regulation.”

So, the U.S. not only exports their most poisonous manufacturing to the poorest communities in the world, they also export their garbage.

**The system of capitalism is catastrophic to the world**

These examples of the universal destructive forces of capitalism show how the system is leading us into a downward spiral toward the destruction of life on the whole planet.

The capitalists maintain their power through the private ownership of the means of production and the wealth produced by the labor of the working class.

The capitalists pay the lowest wages they can get away with; workers get paid as much as they are able to unite, fight for, and win.

**The power of the working class**

The members of the capitalist class are a tiny minority of humanity.

Workers, united in solidarity for the benefit of all, have the power to flip the scales in favor of freedom, justice and economic equality, the preservation of the planet, and of the future.

Workers do the work. We should have complete democratic control over the means of production and share the wealth we produce—to each according to needs and desires, and from each according to individual skills and talents—production for human needs, not private profits.

We, the overwhelming majority of humanity, have the same interests in the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

Through unity and solidarity, we have the power to achieve these interests in common.

United together we can create a society that ensures that each person can develop their talents to the fullest—a socialist society that puts human life, and the health and safety of our planet, and all the other species that share it, above all else—a society that can achieve the best possible life for all.

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1 “U.S. Relations With Brazil,” January 29, 2021, U.S. Department of State: https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-brazil/

*Kabul, Afghanistan, August 1 2021, refugee children after the collapse of the country in August 2021. (Shutterstock)*
The assassination of President Jovenel Moïse of Haiti in July looks to the U.S. news media like a mystery lover’s “who dunit” paradise. A president is killed in his bedroom by mercenaries from Columbia, apparently with connection to a doctor in Florida, in a heavily-guarded compound in which there is only one road in; yet there was no one there to stop five mysterious cars driving in, or the shooters from getting straight to the president’s bedroom at 2:00 A.M.

Police are arresting dozens, but do not have any real answers. Was the Florida-based Haitian doctor, Christian Sanon, “real part of the plot”? “Columbian officials” have identified a former Haitian intelligence official as the one who gave the order for the murder.1 But who are the financiers behind the gang of mercenaries? The president’s wife, who was also shot and left for dead but survived, says the real culprits haven’t been found yet. Is she hiding their identity, or is she really just a victim?

The hidden culprit

Despite all the confusing details and conflicting theories, there is one murderous agent lurking in the background that none of the Haitian investigators, nor most of the media want to mention, but which is well known to every Haitian alive, and that is the U.S. The most recent chapter in this sad saga lies in how Jovenel Moïse, and his party, the PHTK (Haitian Tet Kale Party,) came to power in the first place.

PHTK rule began with the fraudulent election of Michel Martelly in 2010, which was assured by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who detoured from her trip to the Middle East at the height of the Arab Spring events to put him in office.2 This election, and that of Moïse in 2016, were blatantly fraudulent. The tricks of fake elections are well established in Haiti by the ruling elite there, who protect their wealth and that of their overseer, U.S. imperialism. Elections are rigged by such methods as changing polling places at the last minute, so that voters from certain neighborhoods have their votes thrown out for voting in the wrong place. Ballots have been found in dumpsters throughout Haiti.

Electoral coup d'états

The “elections” of Martelly and Moïse were both held under the UN occupation of 2005 to 2017. These frauds were called “electoral coup d’états” by the Haitian people; and they have risen up in protest against them, as they have many times before. And with Moïse’s extension of his rule past the end of his term—with the excuse that he was deprived of a year at the beginning because of challenges to his bogus election—the demonstrations exploded. These protests continued despite the Moïse government’s brutal reprisals.

Moïse’s attacks on the people included the worst massacre in decades, which occurred in La Saline, in 2018. Over 14 hours, gangsters “carried out a vicious attack on the community...the assailants systematically extracted victims, including children, from their homes and executed them at gunpoint and with machetes.” Reports like this also came in from the neighborhoods of Bel-Air, and Cite Soleil, in 2019 and 2020. These atrocities were carried out by gangs organized by officials of Moïse’s government working with a gang leader, Jimmy Cherizier, alias “Barbecue.” Cherizier, with other criminal miscreants, developed a gang called G9. This is the basis of the news reports of “gangs” in Haiti, which are portrayed as something separate from the government. They are not. All of this was well documented and reported in a Harvard Law School report issued in April 2021.3

Congress’s complaints go nowhere

This Harvard Law School report was just one of several signs that the U.S. “political class,” representing the ruling class, was getting fed up with Moïse’s inability to maintain control in Haiti. Congress members were complaining. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont said, “The message that we send by standing by these people [i.e., Moïse’s government] is that we think they are the legitimate representatives of the Haitian people. They are not.” Is that right? So, Senator Leahy, we ask: Is the legitimate representative of the Haitian people the U.S. government, which put Martelly and Moïse in power in the first place?

Despite complaints by some 60 or so Congress persons, the Biden regime stuck with Moïse to the end, including by endorsing the first replacement, Prime Minister Claude Joseph, who was soon dumped for someone else. Biden, however, refused the call from Haiti to send in U.S. troops.

It’s interesting that some members of the Haitian elite immediately wanted U.S. military intervention, and the U.S. refused, but it doesn’t alter the balance of power. This assassination was an inside job, involving clique struggles within the elites of Haiti. It’s likely it was a move by opponents of the PHTK, who didn’t like Moïse’s abuse of power to expand his own personal holdings and land grabs in the country. These opponents want these privileges for themselves of course. The U.S. could not care less about which puppet runs the country, as long as U.S. interests are maintained.

Haiti: A History of Imperialist Domination Continues

By Chris Kinder

6 SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT Vol. 21, No. 5
Imperial domination goes back to the beginning

This deadly regime of U.S. flunkies is just the current manifestation of imperialist tyranny in the island. The oppression began with the first voyage of Cristoforo Columbo, whom were slave owners themselves—as, and free people of color—some of whom were slave owners themselves—resided. Soon the rebellion encompassed all of the colony’s eight thousand plantations. Tousaint L’Overture, a former coachman and slave who had been freed by his owner, emerged as the very savvy military and political leader.6

This revolt caused panic throughout the world of slavery-based mercantile imperialists. In Virginia, an “Act against divulgers of false news” was passed to keep the slaves ignorant of the revolt, but they quickly learned of it anyway. France was involved in revolution itself at the time, but the Rights of Man didn’t include freedom for slaves. In three years however, after abolition of slavery was a fait accompli in the colony, the Jacobin government announced freedom for all slaves in French colonies. Meanwhile, as the French Revolution began to cause chaos in the colony’s elite—some French republicans supported slave freedom—the slave owning refugees in the cities revered George Washington, among others. They understood that the U.S. war of independence against Britain stood for keeping slaves, not freeing them.

The invasion of the British

The first imperialist army to invade with the intent of defeating the slaves was the British. With the French empire in turmoil, the English lords relished the possibility of grabbing this super-profitable colony for themselves. They sent the largest overseas invasion fleet that had ever left their shores to St. Domingue. But they used the same anti-quotiated tactics to this colony as they had in the 1776 rebellion in North America. They faced the same guerrilla warfare tactics as they had in the future nation to the north, but this time they were in the tropics. Wearing regulation flannel uniforms and underwear, British troops dropped dead from heat exhaustion and disease more than they did at the hands of Tousaint’s bare-footed guerrillas. They left the island in retreat, having lost 60 percent of their numbers.

In 1794, during the radical period under the Jacobins, France became the first country to declare freedom for all slaves throughout its empire. Soon however, there was a political counter-revolution, and Napoleon Bonaparte took power. Napoleon’s attack on what was soon to become Haiti was the next imperialist attempt to defeat the former slaves in the colony. In 1802, the French sent the largest invasion force that had ever left their shores, as had the British. At first it seemed as if they were winning, but then a secret statement by Napoleon, that he was planning to restore the system of slavery in all French colonies—thus repealing the Jacobin decree of abolition—was revealed. This galvanized Tousaint’s former-slave army into action like never before, and led to a decisive defeat of the French.7

Jean-Jacques Dessalines

Tousaint had been captured and sent to France, where he died in prison, but Jean-Jacques Dessalines had successfully taken the reins of his army. Soon thereafter, in 1804, the independence of Haiti was a fact: the only country ever to achieve a successful slave rebellion, and independence from imperialist domination as well. While Haiti had some corrupt rulers over the years, including some who introduced a form of serfdom on the former slaves, the new country was steadfast in its opposition slavery. Haiti offered aid to Simon Bolivar in his campaign to free the Spanish colonies in South America on the condition that he liberate all the slaves. Haiti also fought to free the slaves of its Spanish-owned neighbor, Santo Domingo.

But ever since the day of independence of Haiti, the imperialist powers have never forgotten to take revenge for the loss of the slaves and this profitable property. The U.S., under the slave-owner Jefferson, refused, along with most other imperialist powers, to recognize the new nation. Britain recognized Haiti in 1833, as it abolished slavery in its empire. Only the departure of the Confederate states in the Civil War prompted the U.S. to reverse course, and recognize Haiti, in 1862.
France imposes debt on young Haiti

France did the U.S. one better, for the time being anyway, when in 1825 it sent a flotilla of war ships to Haiti, and successfully extracted a payment of 150 million francs for their loss of property (plantations and slaves,) in exchange for recognizing the new nation. The enforced payments hampered Haiti’s economic growth, and it was made worse when Haiti borrowed from Western countries at high interest rates, including the U.S. By 1900, Haiti was losing 80 percent of its gross national product to debt. The payments only ended in 1947.

Out of all the excruciating punishment imposed by imperialist powers on independent Haiti, perhaps the worst was the U.S. military occupation of the country from 1915 to 1934. By the turn of the Century, the U.S. held some of Haiti’s debt, and had also become Haiti’s chief trading partner, replacing France. Not only that, but U.S. financial interests had gotten control of Haiti’s national bank, and the U.S. seized Haiti’s gold reserves in a gunboat-diplomacy action in 1914.

U.S. invasion and occupation

The following year, President Woodrow Wilson—the most racist U.S. president of modern times—found an excuse to do a full-scale invasion. A popular uprising against a Haitian president who had ordered the execution of 167 political prisoners led to an uprising, and to his lynching. Financiers in the U.S. saw these developments as a threat to their interests, despite Haiti’s record of payments on its debt.

But the reasons for the occupation went deeper. Following its independence in 1804, Haiti under Dessalines had enshrined in its constitution that foreigners could not own land in Haiti. Wilson wanted to rewrite Haiti’s constitution so that U.S. financiers could invest in land ownership to exploit resources in Haiti, from minerals to other business opportunities.

The occupiers inserted a president of their choosing; and Franklin D Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, wrote a new constitution which specifically allowed foreigners to own property in Haiti. This was long considered an anathema to Haitians. The Haitian legislature rejected it, so the U.S. ordered the puppet president to abolish it, which he did. Haiti remained without a legislature until 1929. The occupiers also created the Gendarmerie of Haiti to serve their interests in policing. This is now known as the Garde d’Haïti, and it hasn’t changed much.

The Caco Wars.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Marines fought against Haitian rebels in the Caco Wars, which began almost immediately. The Cacos were men, originally slaves, but also refugees from corvee (forced) labor detachments that were imposed during the U.S. occupation, mainly to build roads. Some corvee workers were forced to work while in shackles, and without pay. The main purpose of road building was to provide an easy way for the U.S. military to get around in suppressing insurrections. The similarity to the chain gangs and other Jim Crow methods in the U.S. South at the time is stark.

The Cacos formed guerrilla armies in the mountainous areas separating Haiti from San Domingo to fight the U.S. Marines, and free the corvee laborers. The Marines eventually defeated them in the First Caco War, and tortured and killed their leader, one Charlemagne Péralté. But that wasn’t enough. The occupiers took a picture of the dead leader, after he was strung up and hung on a door, and distributed it widely, expecting this to terrify Haitians into submission. It had the opposite effect: Charlemagne Péralté’s gruesome picture looked to many like the crucifixion of Christ, and inspired more Caco rebellions. Charlemagne Péralté remains revered as a hero to this day.

A long, brutal occupation

The puppet government of Haiti could do absolutely nothing without U.S. approval, and U.S. operatives controlled many of the ministries. The occupation of Haiti was long, brutal and dictatorial; and the racism was blatant. Most of the soldiers sent there were from the South, and they showed it, including the officers. At first, the brass and their wives mixed with the mostly mulatto Haitian elite in social gatherings, but soon, they excluded anyone of color from their gatherings.

In 1920 the NAACP published a report on conditions in occupied Haiti, written by James Weldon Johnson. Johnson reported that there were “...needless killings of natives by marines,” and that, “some marines had cut a notch in their rifles for each native killed.” The author also managed to sit in on some social gatherings among the elites and U.S. military brass. These offi-
cers established elegant homes in the hills above Port au Prince, and acted as if they owned the place (which they did, basically.) Most had more servants than they could ever afford at home. Johnson reported that one such officer commented that “...some of these people with a little money and education think they are as good as we are.”

Johnson’s report compared the U.S. in Haiti with the South at home. “The man who is Superintendent of Public Instruction was formerly a schoolteacher in Louisiana. It seems like a practical joke to send a man from Louisiana, where they do not have good schools even for white people, down to Haiti to organize schools for Black children.” He also concluded that imposing southern conditions in the U.S. on Haiti was intentional. “Americans have carried American prejudice to Haiti. Before their advent, there was no such thing in social circles as race prejudice.” “These Southerners have found Haiti to be the veritable promised land of ‘jobs for deserving democrats.'”

**Congress to U.S.—stay in Haiti**

A Congressional “investigation” began during the occupation, sparked in part by a military officer who admitted to the “indiscriminate killing and ill treatment of Haitians by native gendarmarie under the direct command of officers of the United States marine corps.” This “investigation” turned instead into a defense of the occupation, and warned of “anarchy, barbarism and ruin” if the U.S. left.

The devastating and racist occupation of Haiti—lasting 19 years—had a profound effect on Haiti’s future as a virtual colony of the U.S. After the U.S. departure there was a series of short-lived presidencies including U.S. puppets. But the U.S. occupation had also created a sense of Black nationalism in the country. Twenty-three years later, in 1957, this contributed to the election of Francois Duvalier (called “Papa Doc.”) who promoted Black people into the elite and was initially popular.

But he declared himself “President for Life,” and created a private army of brutal enforcers of his dictatorship called the Tonton Macoutes. This gang of lawless thugs was the precursor of all the private gangs employed by subsequent autocrats such as Martelly and Moise, with his G9 “gang.”

...in 1804, the independence of Haiti was a fact: the only country ever to achieve a successful slave rebellion, and independence from imperialist domination as well...

Ever since its occupation, the U.S. imperium has ruled in Haiti. Twice, in 1991 and 2004, U.S.-backed military coups to remove Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the only genuinely democratic president of Haiti in modern times. Among other things, Aristide tried to get 21 billion in reparations from France as compensation for the debt the French had imposed on Haiti.

The lesson to be drawn today from the assassination of Moise is clear: U.S. hands are all over it. Will we ever learn who the real culprits were? Of course, there will be “patsies,” as Lee Harvey Oswald claimed he was for the killing of Kennedy. Will we ever know who really “dunit” in that case? Probably not. But in that case and this, we know who was really behind the scenes, pulling the strings. We also know that the Haitian working people, like the rebellious slaves and Cacos before them, will never stop fighting for their liberation.

**NOTE:** A powerful 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti on August 14th, leaving devastation in its wake. At this writing, almost 2000 people have been killed, with more expected to be found. In 2010, a 7.0 earthquake killed 300,000, and left millions in tent cities.

Centered on Haiti’s southern peninsula, the earthquake severely damaged the cities of Les Cayes and Jeremie. Hospitals in the area are overwhelmed. And, to make matters even worse, a tropical storm hit Haiti two days later, with a second storm on the way.

The Haiti Emergency Relief Fund is asking for help. Every dollar received will go directly to grass roots community organizations on the ground in Haiti. As you read this, help will still be much needed and appreciated.

**Please send donations to:**

www.haitiemergencyrelief.org

Haiti Emergency Relief Fund
c/o East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
2362 Bancroft Way
Berkeley, CA 94704

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1 “Haitian Ex-Intelligence Officer Gave Order to Kill President,” New York Times, July 17, 2021
2 “The Assassination of Jovenel Moise, What Next for Haiti,” Seth Donnelly, Counterpunch, July 13, 2021, is also available on haiti solidarity.net.
4 Cristoforo Colombo was the given name of the Italian adventurer who sailed in 1492 for the King of Spain in search of gold, also known as Christopher Columbus.
5 See Laurent Dubois, Haiti, the Aftershocks of History, New York, 2021, for an excellent history of the country and its experience.
6 Toussaint made sure the slave owner who had freed him managed to get away safely before he joined the revolt. See Adam Hochschild, Bury the Chains, Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves, New York, 2005, for an excellent narrative on the slave revolt in St. Domingue and other colonies.
7 Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo is recorded as his most important defeat, but in terms of its social and cultural significance, his defeat by ex-slaves in Haiti is a much more important historical marker.
8 One of Wilson’s first acts was to fire all the Black help in the White House, and fire all the Black Post Office officials in the country.
10 Merced Sun-Star, October 1921.
Building Solidarity with Haiti’s Popular Movement

By Robert Roth

Today, in Haiti, the violent rule of Jovenel Moïse has come to a violent end. Moïse himself had recently said he had “about a million enemies,” and that was undoubtedly true. In his effort to maintain power and exercise full dictatorial control, he not only sparked a powerful grassroots uprising, but angered other factions within Haiti’s elite.

It may take quite a while to fully decipher the internecine battles within ruling circles that led to his demise. In the midst of all the confusion and sensationalism surrounding what happened—Colombian hit squads, a Haitian American doctor and politician arrested as a conspirator, the supposed ignorance of the U.S. Embassy as armored SUVs rolled up on Moïse’s house, DEA informants and other U.S. assets involved in the plot, the arrest of Moïse’s head of palace security—we need to analyze the fundamental issues at stake in Haiti right now.

As we do this, it is important to identify and reject the racist tropes that have always dominated mainstream media discussion of Haiti and are once again at play. From the time of its revolution against the brutal French slave system, and its historic victory against the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization. Lavalas means “flash flood” in Creole, signifying the gathering together of people’s power. The Lavalas movement emerged in the struggle to rid Haiti of the U.S.-backed Duvalier dictatorships in the 1980s, and brought Aristide into office in 1991 and then again in 2001. Under Lavalas administrations, more schools were built than in Haiti’s entire history, funding was dramatically increased for public health and literacy projects, the minimum wage was doubled, and

to the usual racial code words: “dysfunction,” “chaos,” “gang warfare,” “failed state.” All of this hides the guiding hand of the United States and other imperial powers in creating the conditions that have brought about this disastrous period for Haitians. And it studiously ignores the steadfast fight for democracy, education, healthcare and dignity embodied by Haiti’s unshakeable popular movement.

An op-ed in The Washington Post stated, without a trace of irony: “There’s a hidden story here—one that is rarely discussed—when countries such as Haiti—so often end up with toxic, destructive leaders.” An editorial in the same newspaper called for a stepped-up United Nations occupation, asking “Does Anyone Have a Better Idea?” ignoring the fact that the current 17-year UN occupation brought a deadly cholera epidemic, rampant sexual exploitation, and violent repression of the popular movement. The “better idea,” of course, is for Haitians to determine their own destiny, free from the corrupt and dictatorial regimes imposed upon them by foreign forces.

Today’s crisis in Haiti has its roots in the 2004 U.S.-orchestrated coup against the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization. Lavalas means “flash flood” in Creole, signifying the gathering together of people’s power. The Lavalas movement emerged in the struggle to rid Haiti of the U.S.-backed Duvalier dictatorships in the 1980s, and brought Aristide into office in 1991 and then again in 2001. Under Lavalas administrations, more schools were built than in Haiti’s entire history, funding was dramatically increased for public health and literacy projects, the minimum wage was doubled, and

the brutal Haitian Armed Forces was abolished. This was all laid waste when the U.S. organized a coup d’état against Aristide and then orchestrated a UN occupation to derail this process of progress and change.

Instead of the steps towards inclusion, economic and social reform under Aristide, which he characterized as moving “from misery to poverty with dignity,” for the last 17 years Haitians have had to deal with yet another foreign occupation, this time by the United Nations, and a series of reactionary regimes that have looted the state treasury, increased food insecurity and poverty, and organized terror campaigns against the opposition. The unraveling that Haiti is experiencing today flows directly from this assault on Haiti’s nascent democracy, and on its sovereignty.

Moïse was a U.S.-backed tyrant, ruling by decree, handpicked by his mentor and predecessor, Michel Martelly of the right-wing PHTK party, whose own election in 2010 had been orchestrated by then-U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In 2015, Moïse’s sham election as president was denounced as an “electoral coup d’état” by the grassroots movement in Haiti. Hundreds-of-thousands of Haitians took to the streets every day for over two months, forcing the election results to be annulled. The follow-up election was just as illegitimate—filled with fraud, voter suppression, and intimidation. Yet the U.S./UN and the OAS (Organization of American States) immediately sanctioned its legitimacy, setting the stage for his Duvalier-like dictatorship.

From the day he was selected, Moïse’s regime was a testament to corruption and terror. Implicated in a money laundering scheme during Martelly’s presidency, Moïse was accused of having taken in $5 million
for his role in the scheme. After he assumed office, he simply removed the head of the agency that had done the investigation. Throughout Haiti, Moise was known as the “indicted one.”

Soon after, the Petrocaribe scandal exploded. Venezuela had provided Haiti with oil for years at well below the market rate. With the profits from the oil sales, the Haitian government was supposed to fund schools, hospitals and other social programs. Instead, under both Martelly and Moise, the money disappeared, pocketed by government officials, to the tune of over $3 billion. “Where is the Petrocaribe money?” was the slogan as a full-scale uprising demanded Moise’s resignation.

As mass protests grew and his government teetered, Moise turned to full-scale terror, weaponizing criminal elements and turning them into death squads backed by sectors of his police force (financed and trained by the United States) and using them to attack opposition neighborhoods. The most horrific example was in Lasalin in November 2018, where hundreds were killed, women were gang raped, and people’s homes were burned to the ground, forcing a mass exodus out of the community. Operating with impunity, paramilitary forces tied to Moise’s government, including the so-called G-9 led by ex-police officer Jimmy “Barbecue” Cherzier, unleashed a wave of violence throughout the poorest communities of Port-au-Prince, making life in the country unlivable. Tens-of-thousands of Haitians have had to flee their homes, becoming internal refugees, in order to escape the death squads. Kidnappings have soared in Port-au-Prince, where even market vendors with little or no resources have been abducted.

This was the regime that the U.S. and the UN occupation supported with unwavering political backing and millions of dollars in aid. In the wake of the assassination, we are seeing more of the same, with hardly any disguise. For example, on July 18th, the U.S. and its colonial Core Group (a consortium composed of the U.S, France, Germany, Canada, Brazil, the OAS, the UN, Spain and the European Union) announced their support for Ariel Henry, who Moise had designated as Prime Minister two days before his death. Within a day, the interim Prime Minister, Claude Joseph, resigned. The Core Group then urged Henry to form a new government, which undoubtedly will follow in the footsteps of the Moise and Martelly regimes.

These moves, and others that are sure to come, are designed to perpetuate elite control of Haiti, with new faces at the top, and to marginalize the role of the mass popular movement.

We should be clear, in this regard, on the positions taken over the last months by the Biden Administration. When a new wave of large-scale protests erupted in Haiti this past February, demanding that Moise leave office, particularly since his term had officially expired on February 7th, the Biden State Department and the OAS announced its support for him to stay one more year and to organize a new set of elections in September. Their backing is what allowed Moise to retain power. The Biden Administration continues to insist that new presidential and Parliamentary elections should be held in September, under the aegis of the current Haitian government. This rush to a new set of phony elections is designed to keep elite and foreign control of Haiti. It has been opposed by the popular movement, which is demanding instead a transitional government of public safety (Sali Piblik), constructed by broad sectors of Haitian society, which could then establish a basis for free and fair elections.

In 2019, as popular mobilizations against the Moise regime surged, Fanmi Lavalas Political Organization stated:

“It is imperative that we respect the people’s aspirations for progress and for a just society. It is paramount that we stand in solidarity with the people’s protests demanding a new form of state. The nation deserves a new system that is more in harmony with the dreams of our founders, a new vision of the republic rooted in justice, transparency and participation... No cosmetic solution will bring an effective and lasting solution to the crisis in which we are plunged. This system has run its course. It cannot be patched up. It must be changed.”

As we build solidarity with Haiti over this next period, as we oppose continued foreign intervention, and as we challenge the U.S. government’s ongoing sabotage of Haitian democracy, we should keep those words in mind.

We need to demand the following:

1. Cut off all U.S. aid for the Haitian police once and for all.
2. Stop the Biden Administration’s support for the PHTK regime regardless of what new figurehead becomes president.
3. End U.S. support for sham elections in Haiti.
4. Support the right of the Haitian people to form, through their own popular movement, their own transition government free from U.S. interference. No more U.S./UN military intervention in Haiti.

Robert Roth is an educator and a co-founder of Haiti Action Committee.

—Haiti Action Committee, July 19, 2021

https://haitisolidarity.net/building-solidarity-with-haitis-popular-movement/

Haiti Action Committee
PO Box 2040
Berkeley, CA 94702
https://haitisolidarity.net
Contributions to Haiti Action Committee are not tax deductible for IRS purposes.

1 The Haitian Tèt Kale Party is a Haitian political party. Tèt Kale means “Bald Headed” in Haitian Creole.

Two countries have made the front pages and lead stories in our lemming-like capitalist media: Haiti and Cuba.

One country—Haiti—has earned the ire of the self-styled Western democracies by overthrowing its colonial slave masters and establishing a free state in 1803, the first country in history to liberate itself from European-imposed slavery. The Europeans and elites in the U.S. never forgave the rebellious followers of Toussaint L’Ouverture and their descendants. Through occupations, threats, “incentives,” and economic extortion, imperialism has ensured that Haiti remains among the poorest countries of the Americas, ranking 170 of 189 countries. Index includes life expectancy, years of schooling and per capita income on the UN’s Human Development Index.

The brutal assassination of the Haitian President, an attempted coup d’état by rightwing mercenaries, only added to the country’s miseries.

Meanwhile, the U.S. cannot decide who it wants to lead Haiti since the assassination: The UN special representative for Haiti, Helen La Lime, a U.S. citizen, designated Claude Joseph. But the self-styled International Core group—a collection of ambassadors led by the U.S.—has designated Ariel Henry. As has become the custom, the Haitian people will have little say.

The other country—Cuba—earned its punishment in 1959 when Cuban revolutionaries defeated the U.S. puppet government of Fulgencio Battista, liberating the island’s people from a destiny as the U.S.’s playground and a source of super-exploited labor. The U.S. has never forgiven the Fidelistas for their defiance of the empire to the north. Cuba’s embrace of socialism only enraged the beast even more.

U.S. agencies devote persistent attention to overthrowing the government of Cuba and many millions of dollars back up those goals. Against the expressed UN opposition of nearly every country in the world, the U.S. has imposed an air-tight blockade against the tiny island of eleven million people, denying its people even the most basic fruits of economic activity. Moreover, a day has not passed in the last sixty years that the U.S. was not intervening in Cuban affairs.

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Therefore, anyone who has any familiarity with recent Cuban history and has read reports of “demonstrations” on July 11 directed against the Cuban government must immediately look for the barely-hidden hand of U.S. agency, supporting, even directing these demonstrations. It is impossible for any honest journalist to not at least entertain the possibility of U.S. involvement.

And yet the first reports from NPR referred to the spontaneity of these demonstrations, as though there was no organization or planning, a ridiculous claim for a network that also insists that Cuba is a police state. Excited reporters inflated the numbers engaged from hundreds to thousands. Pictures cropped or lifted from entirely different, even pro-Cuba events were disseminated by the blood-lusting media, including AP, Reuters, The Financial Times, and The Guardian, and others, as evidence of street opposition.

The number of wild, outlandish claims about Cuba grew geometrically after the events of July 11. The watchdogs of social media were uncharacteristically docile as every imaginable slander of Cuba emerged, a commonplace of U.S. destabilization campaigns.

NPR, The Wall Street Journal, and other media sources attributed the spark for these demonstrations to a dissident rapper who created a slick video in collaboration with a “superstar” expatriate rapper with deep pockets. While this made for an attractive cover—a feel-good story of individual courage and initiative—the mainstream media showed little interest in the U.S.-financed twitter campaign waged through automated tweets emanating from outside the island and backed by U.S. dollars.

They also fail to mention the focused U.S. campaign to fund and influence the island’s youth culture against the Cuban government.

For an industry fixated on exposing “meddling” in U.S. affairs, the infotainment corporations chose to ignore the long history of U.S.-funded regime-change fronts assigned to destabilize Cuba. The World Peace Council provides a handy guide to numerous U.S.-sponsored media organs aligned against the leadership of the Cuban Communist Party, all of which barely conceal their interference in Cuban affairs.

Shamefully, those who are today aghast at conditions in Cuba and blame Cuban problems on the revolutionary leadership that Cuban citizens have chosen never directly address the cruel blockade, the even more stringent sanctions, and the intimidation of Cuba’s friends by its unfriendly neighbors. They do not point to the lost trade, the forbidden remittances, the denied tourism that would allow Cubans to live a more prosperous life.
In a matter-of-fact fashion, Western commentators cite the recent rise of COVID cases in Cuba, neglecting to mention the lack of syringes to deliver the vaccines developed by Cuba’s advanced biomedical programs, a lack that is the direct result of the U.S.-imposed blockade. A campaign to counter the blockade and provide syringes to save Cubans from COVID death has been in effect for many months, entirely ignored by the capitalist media.

While conditions are difficult in Cuba, the vast majority of Cubans have and will continue to support a revolutionary government that stands between them and the world of grinding poverty and degradation that their grandparents knew. Even the younger generations that never experienced the colonial horrors of gangster rule and slave-like working conditions bear the pride in independence that stretches from Jose Marti to Fidel Castro. They will not surrender their right to determine Cuba’s future to foreign interests and democracy haters.

The U.S.’s capitalist allies choose to stand with the bully against a proud, but poor victim, surrendering their integrity to a vicious blockade. The values that NATO so sanctimoniously proclaims are mocked by the organization’s complicity in strangling the tiny Caribbean Island.

Of course, there is a lesson for those umbilically tied to the Democratic Party. Despite campaign pledges, Biden has continued, even exceeded, Trump’s assault on Cuban independence. Journalists have urged his press secretary to elaborate his Cuba policy, but received only evasions. That policy is now clear. The Miami Mafia and New Jersey’s Havana on the Hudson drive Biden’s team to retreat from Obama’s opening and toward subversion of Cuba’s right to self-determination. For the ethically challenged New Jersey Senator Menendez’s vote, the Biden administration is willing to sell out Cuba.

In the midst of the July 11 excuse for attacking Cuban socialism and Cuban sovereignty, a group including “leftist” intellectuals Etienne Balibar, Noam Chomsky, Robert Brenner, and Mike Davis picked this particular moment to circulate a petition to free Cuban intellectuals allegedly arrested by Cuban authorities on July 11. While pounding their solidarity with Cuba, they show no indication that they discussed the allegation publicly or privately with Cuban authorities; they grant no prima facie credibility to the Cuban criminal justice system; from afar, they assume innocence of charges despite little or no knowledge of the circumstances. In short, they presume that the Cuban authorities engage in arbitrary, unwarranted arrests—a hallmark of a police state. This is a strange posture for “friends” of the Cuban revolution—an irresponsible, unconscionable act while Cuba is under severe duress from imperialism.

This is not a moment for quarreling over individual rights—the manic obsession of the comfortable and the privileged—when the collective right of self-determination claimed by eleven million Cubans is under attack by our leaders.

At great costs, Cuba has escaped the plight of Haiti, successfully holding off the domination of the North American behemoth. Should U.S. imperialism succeed, Cuba will be swarmed by U.S. agencies, corrupt aid packages, World Bank and IMF carpetbaggers, and the other counterparts to the sanctimonious missionaries of the Colonial era.

Haiti and Cuba have the same enemies. They are victimized by the same opportunistic politicians, the same jaded journalists, and the same spies, who all work to maintain or turn both into neo-colonies.

The same nest of counter revolutionaries, criminals, and vultures headquartered in Miami that now call for the bombing or invasion of Cuba and for sending troops to Haiti gave birth to the assassination of Haiti’s president on July 7.

Cuba and Haiti will win!
— ZZ’s blog, July 19, 2021
http://zzs-blg.blogspot.com

1 Most of the protesters including Marxist Frank Hernandez Garcia were released a few hours later.

https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/07/16/us-concern-for-cuba-latin-america-is-spin-for-intervention/
The following is a Facebook post released in Cuba July 12, 2021. The author, Ernesto Limia Díaz, is First Vice-president of the Writers Association of UNEAC (National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba).

Socialist Viewpoint is reprinting this post from World Outlook.

Havana, July 12, 2021—I detect a certain tendency to misrepresent our president’s speech,1 saying he incited a confrontation between Cubans.

First it is useful to clarify, that [President] Díaz-Canel clearly defined three groups involved in the demonstrations that occurred in various locations:

- Revolutionaries affected by the hardships,
- People who have fallen for the cock-and-bull tales broadcast by the mendacious media in Miami, and,
- A hard core of counter-revolutionary provocateurs.

Unlike other nearby countries, including the United States, there were no images circulating in the media, “Escafandras”2 or clubs; no one was killed like in Colombia, or blinded by rubber bullets like in Chile, nor were people beaten like in the United States during the Black Lives Matter protests. The world could witness a most unheard-of image: a president in the eye of the hurricane chatting, discussing, explaining…

Nowhere else on this planet would something like this be seen. His attitude is admirable, as admirable is the effort by the nation, and despite the efforts of its powerful neighbor, which seeks to strangle it, so as to present itself as its “savior” and impose its will on Cuba.

[President] Díaz-Canel did not call for mayhem, or for anyone to be mistreated. He did not call for lynchings or police repression, which is common in this hypocritical world, where they speak of freedom only to impose the dictatorship of the powerful.

[President] Díaz-Canel called on us not to allow a “soft” coup to succeed, which sought to serve as a pretext for a statement by the Organization of American States (OAS) calling for a “humanitarian” military intervention, as they have done elsewhere.

It’s worthwhile recalling at this time what [José] Martí3 said to Gonzalo de Quesada more than a hundred years ago: “And once the United States gets in Cuba, who will remove them?” It’s up to the revolutionaries and the Cuban people, patriots and rulers of our own destiny, to prevent it. This is no time for naivete, a destabilizing operation against our country has been underway for some time, and simply letting it succeed would be paid for in blood. Examples abound.

Regarding confrontations between Cubans: there were in the 19th century, between patriots and Autonomistas;4 and also from 1898 to 1902, between supporters of independence and Anexionistas [annexationists];5 and there were confrontations after the Republic was born, albeit deformed by the Platt Amendment, between patriots and supporters of the Platt Amendment;6 and there were during the revolution of 1930, defeated by our “illustrious” neighbor; and there was the year after the centenary of the Apostle (José Martí), when the streets and mountains of Cuba ran red with the blood of revolutionaries, in order to overthrow a bloodthirsty tyrant who brought grief and shame to our homeland.

The class struggle exists and will exist, it is the struggle between the bourgeoisie and its forces, arrayed against a revolution of the downtrodden, by the downtrodden, and for the downtrodden.
We must engage in discussions, win people over, provide perspectives, seek solutions all of us together, with young people leading the charge, all while facing an unremitting siege, which will only intensify. This generation of revolutionaries will not allow the conquests that our forefathers bequeathed us to be torn from our hands.

We are neither intolerant nor irresponsible. Despite foreign attacks and provocations, we have remained calm and acted with prudence. That’s not a sign of weakness. It’s evidence of confidence and strength. But have no doubt: should it be necessary, we are ready to give our own life for the ideals of justice and social equality for which so many men and women already gave their lives, ever since the Father of our homeland proclaimed: “Independence or death!” in Demajagua, and freed his slaves, inviting them into the vanguard of the Army of Independence.

—World-Outlook.Com, July 15, 2021

https://world-outlook.com/2021/07/15/we-are-neither-intolerant-nor-irresponsible-but-we-will-give-up-our-lives-for-the-ideals-of-revolution/

The class struggle exists and will exist, it is the struggle between the bourgeoisie and its forces, arrayed against a revolution of the downtrodden, by the downtrodden, and for the downtrodden.

1 President of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel gave a speech on July 11, 2021, in response to protests in Cuba. An article in the July 12 edition of the Cuban daily Granma reported on that speech. See “We Will Defend the Revolution Above All Else” published July 12, 2021, on World-Outlook.com

U.S. Weaponization of Cuba Protests

BY Peter Bolton

On Sunday, July 11, 2021, Cuba saw thousands of demonstrators take to the streets in cities across the island. The protests are believed to have started in the Artemisa Province before spreading to neighboring Havana and further afield, including Cuba’s second-largest city, Santiago de Cuba. Press reports largely claim that protesters are motivated by shortages and the government’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

Needless to say, the U.S. government, its minions in the corporate-owned media, and, of course, the representatives of the Cuban-American exile brigade have seized on the protests to bolster their case for regime change and the continuation of coercive measures against the beleaguered Caribbean island nation. At the forefront of these calls has been Frances Suarez, mayor of Miami—the hinterland of Cuban-American exile hardliners—who has openly called for direct U.S. military intervention into Cuba.

The move comes amidst a growing unwillingness on the part of the Biden administration to roll back some of his predecessor’s policies toward Cuba. The Trump administration had reversed several of the renormalization measures implemented by the Obama administration, in which Biden served as vice-president, in part as an effort to court the support of the Cuban-American community and their representatives, such as senator Marco Rubio of Florida and Robert Menendez of New Jersey.

There were high hopes within progressive circles that Biden would at least return Cuba policy to the Obama days or perhaps even abandon the U.S.’s policy of regime-change altogether. But, so far, he has kept Trump’s policies intact. More ominously, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said to reporters in March that “a Cuba policy shift is not currently among President Biden’s top priorities.”

In the wake of Sunday’s protests, Biden’s position appears to have shifted even further to the right. Referring to the Cuban “regime,” that favorite of Washington’s propaganda terms, he called on the Cuban government to “hear their people and serve their needs at this vital moment rather than enriching themselves.” He added: “We stand with the Cuban people and their clarion call for freedom and relief from the tragic grip of the pandemic and from

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the decades of repression and economic suffering to which they have been subjected by Cuba’s authoritarian regime.”

As would be expected, the corporate-owned media, parroting Washington’s position, repeat accusations of authoritarianism and mismanagement without qualification or nuance. With the Cuban-American exiles added to this mix, commentary has increasingly morphed into a self-reinforcing loop of justification for U.S. intervention as rhetoric gets converted to “fact,” which, in turn, provides justification for U.S. intervention. It therefore falls to independent voices to provide some modicum of balance.

First of all, it is important to put these protests into perspective. Biden talks as if the protesters are representative of the entire Cuban people when there is no evidence to support this insinuation. Cuba is an island of 11 million people who hold diverse views about the revolution and all manner of other matters. There is zero evidence to suggest that the majority of the Cuban people want to reverse the major social gains of the revolution. And why would they when you look at the state of other Caribbean Island nations that have obeyed the Washington Consensus and followed the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank? Perhaps the country in the Caribbean to have most closely followed Washington’s preferred neoliberal economic model has been Haiti, which remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

...how can Washington plausibly claim to be motivated by a deeply held concern for the welfare of the Cuban people when it is simultaneously imposing a set of sanctions that cause great harm to those very same people?

But there is an even deeper layer of hypocrisy when it comes to Washington’s criticism of Cuba, especially when it comes to economic hardship and shortages. Acting assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs Julie Chung tweeted: “Peaceful protests are growing in Cuba as the Cuban people exercise their right to peaceful assembly to express concern about rising COVID cases/deaths and medicine shortages. We commend the numerous efforts of the Cuban people mobilizing donations to help neighbors in need.” The sheer gall of a spokesperson for the U.S. government criticizing the Cuban government for shortages takes audacity to new heights of insolence. Because the biggest cause of such shortages, and of Cuba’s economic woes more broadly, has been the brutal, U.S.-imposed economic blockade that has now lasted for almost 60 years.

Outside the halls of power in Washington, the pages of corporate-owned media outlets, and the fevered imaginations of hardline Cuban-American exiles, this is hardly a controversial point of view. That the embargo has been a major cause of economic hardship in Cuba has been recognized by major regional institutions such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and mainstream human rights organizations such as Amnesty International. Yet the corporate-owned media reports proceed as if the blockade didn’t even exist.

The Associated Press, for instance, attributed the outbreak of protests directly to “food shortages and high prices amid the coronavirus crisis.” These are exactly the kind of problems that are attributable directly to the blockade. The Center for International Policy, a Washington-based NGO, has pointed out that the blockade has “created a situation of scarcity and uncertainty that has affected all aspects of Cuban society.” According to United Nations (UN) figures, meanwhile, the blockade had caused an estimated $130 billion worth of damage to Cuba’s econ-
This figure would almost certainly need to be revised up significantly as of July 2021, not least because of tightening of sanctions against Cuba during the Trump presidency.

**The embargo**

As a result of its transparently coercive and hypocritical nature, the majority of countries belonging to UN General Assembly have voted every year since 1992 (bar 2020 owing to the COVID pandemic) in favor of a resolution condemning the embargo. This year only two countries cast “no” votes—the U.S. and its Middle Eastern proxy state Israel—with three abstentions. The measure, however, has never been formally adopted owing to the U.S.’s use of its veto power, which it holds by virtue of its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The U.S.’s continued imposition of the blockade reveals a major contradiction in the logic of its entire stance toward Cuba. Because how can Washington plausibly claim to be motivated by a deeply held concern for the welfare of the Cuban people when it is simultaneously imposing a set of sanctions that cause great harm to those very same people? As Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel put it during a special address to the nation on Sunday:

“If they want to make a gesture toward Cuba, if they really are concerned about the people, if they want to solve Cuba’s problems: lift the blockade and let’s see how we do, why don’t they do that? Why don’t they have the courage to lift the blockade, what legal and moral basis allows a foreign government to implement such a policy against a small country, and in the midst of such adverse conditions? Isn’t this genocide?”

This latest round of protests in Cuba also exposes another major contradiction in the entire regime-change narrative. Because according to supporters of the blockade, the Cuban people live under such crushing authoritarianism that they wouldn’t dare express any grievance against the government lest they fall afoul of its repressive state security forces. Of course, the reality is that Cubans frequently protest against their government over all manner of issues. And the very fact that they can and do so demolishes the argument that its government is unusually authoritarian when compared to other countries in Latin America.

...the CIA has been at the cutting edge of violent interference into other countries’ affairs and the propping up of dictatorships all throughout the world, and especially in Latin America.

Indeed, regional comparison can be enlightening in other respects too. Because protests lamenting government mismanagement of the coronavirus pandemic are hardly unique to Cuba. Colombia and Brazil have experienced huge protests against their governments’ poor handling of the pandemic this year. Those countries, incidentally, have worse records on COVID response than Cuba does. As Díaz-Canel has pointed out, Cuba has already vaccinated 20 percent of its population using two vaccines that it developed itself, the first Latin American country to have done so. Brazil, on the other hand, has been on the verge of chaos with even some right-wing factions joining in mass protests against the far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro. In April, NPR reported that Brazil had an average daily COVID death toll of over 3,000—the highest in the world.

In spite of all this, has anyone heard calls from Washington, the corporate-owned media, or the Cuban-American exile brigade for the overthrow of the Brazilian and Colombian governments, far less a complete overhaul of their political and economic systems? Surely not, given that both have U.S.-aligned right-wing governments. Colombia has been a key U.S. ally for decades, even earning the nickname “the Israel of Latin America.” Brazil, meanwhile, became particularly close to the U.S. during the Trump administration—in no small part because of the ideological affinity between the two countries’ respective faux-populist demagogic presidents.

**Corporate media contortions**

The desperate mental contortions that the corporate-owned media have engaged in in order to make facts suit their agenda, meanwhile, has been quite a spectacle to behold. Common to these reports, for example, have been attempts to portray the protests as some kind of unprecedented event, never seen before in the history of post-revolutionary Cuba. The New York Times’ Frances Robles, for instance, said: “I have been covering Cuba since the 1994 rafter crisis. I have never ever seen anything like the protests today.” But the insinuation that these protests represent the first time since the revolution that people have taken to the streets to protest the government is patently false.

To take just one example, on May 10, 2002, Cubans representing the Varela Project gathered outside the National Assembly, the country’s legislature, to present a petition containing over 11,000 signatures calling on the government to implement electoral reforms, improve freedom of speech, and release prisoners that the organization deemed as political. This shows decisively that this latest round of protests is far from a unique event in post-revolutionary Cuban history.

Moreover, one has to ask oneself: If Cuba is such an authoritarian country, then how come such an effort is even tolerated in the first place? The other side
might respond: But did the Varela Project have any substantive effect on Cuba’s political system? One could just as easily ask why, in spite of widespread opposition and having twice led to the loser of the popular vote becoming president, the U.S. has still not repealed or even reformed its highly undemocratic electoral college for presidential elections.

In fact, Cuba’s political and economic systems have been altered since 1959. Raúl Castro implemented a series of “updates” to incorporate a degree of market mechanisms into the Cuban economy during his time as president. Cuba’s constitution, meanwhile, has been revised twice since 1959—first in 1976 and again in 2019. Each time this was done as part of a democratic process that encouraged participation by ordinary citizens and groups representing a broad cross-section of Cuban society. In 2019, the finalized version was confirmed via a national plebiscite, in which over 8.7 million Cubans participated, about ten percent of whom voted against it. The U.S., meanwhile, has the very same constitution that was written in the late 18th Century by the so-called “Founding Fathers,” men who in many cases owned slaves and believed suffrage should extend exclusively to property-owning white men.

Other attempts to portray Sunday’s protests as historical sui generis (Latin for unique entities) include the frequent false assumption that the economic woes faced by the country are somehow unique to Cuba. CNN, for example, claims that these latest protests were caused in part because of power outages throughout the island. The often-unspoken assumption is that such a thing must be caused by governmental mismanagement or a lack of “free” market mechanisms. The reality, of course, is that power outages are common throughout Latin America, including in countries led by right and center-right governments. In 2019, for instance, several of South America’s southern cone countries were plunged into a protracted blackout. Of course, no one in the corporate-owned media claimed that this must be due to the inherent failures of capitalism as practiced by the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri in Argentina.

The corporate-owned media reports also seem eager to stress the youthful character of the protesters. To be sure, maintaining revolutionary fervor amongst Cuba’s young people has indeed been a challenge for the government and it’s not hard to see why. As a result of the emergence of popular culture, television, youth subcultures and other such trivialities, youth political apathy is a worldwide phenomenon.

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...the U.S. has not a shred of credibility when it comes to criticizing Cuba...

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Into this vacuum has stepped a U.S.-orchestrated propaganda campaign utilizing social media to weaken support for the revolution and spread misinformation about the Cuban government and U.S. imperialist aggression in Cuba. With obviously far greater financial resources than the Cuban government as well as far more sophisticated technology, these campaigns have almost inevitably had an effect in mobilizing a section of the Cuban population against the government.

Keep in mind also the potential benefits for those who obediently serve the imperial overlord. Far from just receiving financial support and the prospect of political asylum in exchange for denouncing the government, Cuban dissidents in the U.S. attain a status within Cuban-American exile circles bordering on the seraphic, irrespective of their prior ideological orientation or relationship with the government. As political scientist Rafael Hernández puts it: “Overnight, they become independent intellectuals with the keys to credibility in their pocket.”

There is a further layer of nuance to the issue of dissidents in Cuba. The Cuban-American exile lobby, in particular, claims that there is widespread crushing of dissent on the island. However, the reality is that many of these “dissidents” are on the payroll of organizations such as the CIA, or CIA front groups such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). This includes the darling of the Cuban-American exile community and corporate-owned U.S. media, Yoani Sánchez, a well-known CIA asset. According to some estimates, USAID funnels roughly $20 million per year toward so-called “democracy promotion”—Washington codeword for regime change. Keep in mind also that the CIA has been at the cutting edge of violent interference into other countries’ affairs and the propping up of dictatorships all throughout the world, and especially in Latin America.

Given these facts, one then has to ask oneself: Would someone in, say, the United States who advocates violent overthrow of the U.S. government and Constitution, and as part of that plan takes money from a hostile foreign power, be left to go on his or her way, completely unhindered by U.S. law enforcement and the U.S. judicial system? Surely not, given that treason is a capital crime according to U.S. federal law. So, in this sense at least, Cuba is actually more tolerant of political dissent than the United States is.

Deep hypocrisy

All of the above, however, takes second fiddle to Washington’s prime justification for its aggressive stance against Cuba—the now hackneyed accusations of human rights abuses and suppression of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The Biden administration’s national secu-
rity advisor, Jake Sullivan, spelled it out in a tweet, stating that “the U.S. supports freedom of expression and assembly across Cuba, and would strongly condemn any violence or targeting of peaceful protesters who are exercising their universal rights.”

There is, of course, a deep layer of hypocrisy when it comes to Washington’s use of these concepts as part of its interventionist discourse. Because throughout the duration of its aggressive stance toward Cuba, Washington has not only turned a blind eye to, but actively propped up other governments with far worse records on all of these counts. The examples are too numerous to exhaustively list here but include the murderous Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, that replaced the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende, and the brutal military junta in Argentina.

Meanwhile, such problems in Cuba are either deliberately embellished or outright fabricated as part of the process of developing bogus justifications for regime change efforts. In a further layer of irony, the U.S. itself hardly has an exemplary record when it comes to such measures. Demonstrators protesting racial injustice in Portland in 2020, for example, were faced with exactly the kind of heavy-handed police tactics that Washington accuses Cuba of engaging in now.

In short, the U.S. has not a shred of credibility when it comes to criticizing Cuba. And its use of these latest protests to try and shore up its interventionist narrative is just as hypocritical and self-serving as its stance toward Cuba always has been. As its efforts to use these protests as a ruse to move toward ever greater confrontation galvanize, the need to challenge Washington’s propaganda arsenal becomes ever more pressing. Because to be clear, a U.S. military invasion of Cuba would be disastrous.

Since 1959, Cuba has maintained an anti-imperialist National Revolutionary Militia with membership numbering in the millions. In spite of the U.S.’s unrivaled military might, if it chose to invade and occupy Cuba as part of a regime change strategy, this militia would wage a concerted and highly effective guerilla war against the occupying army. While the U.S. might have superior technology and resources, the Cubans obviously know the terrain better. Just as with what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces would likely get bogged down in a protracted quagmire that would leave Washington with just two choices: cut your losses, swallow your pride and leave or else remain tied up in an ever-worsening nightmare with no end in sight. Of course, either option would mean huge bloodshed on both sides and a destabilization of Cuba from which it would likely never recover.

Any change to Cuba’s political and economic system and constitutional set-up must come exclusively from the Cuban people themselves—not from the outside, and most certainly not from a country with a long record of intervention and imperialist domination all throughout the region, not least in Cuba itself.

—CounterPunch, July 14, 2021

The United States, a country with a $20 trillion economy, is waging a full-scale economic war against an island whose economy equals half of one percent of that—Cuba. The war has been going on for 60 years. It began shortly after the 1959 revolution to punish Cuba for taking control of corporations owned by rich capitalists in the United States who had brutally exploited the Cuban people for decades.

Supporters of the Cuban revolution call this economic war a blockade, not an “embargo” like the corporate media. That is because the U.S. government is not only preventing its own citizens and businesses from trading with Cuba, it also prohibits trade with foreign entities that also do business with Cuba. In essence, the United States makes companies choose between doing business in the United States’ $20 trillion economy or in Cuba. Here are six ways that this cruel blockade profoundly impacts the lives of the Cuban people.

1. Food imports

While one of the top priorities of the Cuban government is achieving food self-sufficiency, for now it must import 70 percent of its food. Washington considers this a point of vulnerability.

Keeping Cubans hungry is viewed by the United States as a chief weapon in its arsenal. From 1962 to 2000, the United States outright banned the sale of U.S. food to Cuba. In the early 90s, when Cuba lost its Soviet and Eastern European socialist allies, Washington smelled blood and tightened the blockade, through the Torricelli Law of 1992 and the Helms-Burton Law of 1996. The intended result was malnutrition on a grand scale. Caloric intake on the island dropped by one third during that decade. Against all odds Cuba survived and found new sources of food.

With the U.S. strategy of starving the island into submission failing, and with U.S. agribusiness pushing for normalization with Cuba so they could enter its market, the U.S. finally created an exception in 2000 allowing certain sales of food. The catch: Cuba would be forced to pay “cash in advance.” No other country is forced to deliver cash before the goods can even be loaded onto a ship. With U.S. food sellers prohibited from extending credit to Cuban buyers, the purchase of large volumes of food is difficult and sometimes impossible, making the U.S. market inaccessible. Cuba is thus forced, by design, to pay higher prices in more geographically distant markets. From April 19 to March 2020 (pre-COVID), the additional cost to Cuba was $430 million.

2. Farming

The United States pursues its policy of starvation in other ways: it uses the blockade to kneecap Cuba’s agricultural sector, standing in the way of its ability to become food self-sufficient. The U.S. blockade translates into a chronic lack of machinery, spare parts, fertilizer, fuel, materials for irrigation and other technologies needed to improve farming. As a result, Cuba cannot reach its full farming potential.

More than half of Cuba’s arable land remains uncultivated due to shortages. Cultivated areas often rely on humans and animals to do the plowing and other work instead of machines, drastically reducing crop yields and productivity.

In 2019, the Trump administration adopted new measures to disrupt Cuba’s oil supply, vigorously tracking and sanctioning companies and ships around the world that transported fuel to Cuba. Twenty-seven companies, 54 vessels and three individuals were sanctioned for the “crime” of supplying fuel to Cuba, none of them of U.S. origin or under U.S. jurisdiction. That year, because of fuel shortages, Cuba was unable to plant 12,399 hectares (30,639 acres) of rice, meaning 195,000 tons of food went unproduced. Almost 500 tons of meat went uncollected.

3. Fake charges of “sponsoring terrorism”

The Trump administration re-added Cuba on its spurious list of countries “that sponsor state terrorism.” This is an outrageous lie aimed at tarnishing Cuba’s reputation around the world and further discouraging trade with the country. In fact, when it comes to which country sponsors terrorism it is the other way around.

Cuba’s people have suffered 3,478 deaths from U.S. sponsored terrorism, and 2,099 people wounded. The charge that Cuba refuses to cooperate with the United States in fighting terrorism is shown to be false especially in the case of the Cuban Five. The Cuban government gave the United States informa-
tion that five Cubans had gathered about Miami-based terrorists. The U.S. arrested the Cuban anti-terrorists, subjected them to a kangaroo court and imprisoned them for up to 16 years.

4. Healthcare
Cuba’s preventative, community-oriented, universal healthcare system is not only world renowned, it is also a primary target of the U.S. blockade. From 1964 to 1975, the U.S. forbade all sales of medication, medical equipment, supplies and technology to Cuba. Beginning in 1975, special licenses could be granted by the U.S. government on a case-by-case basis. However, to get a special license, you have to go through the Treasury Department, the Commerce Department, the State Department and finally the Defense Department. A third party would then have to “verify” the goods’ arrival and use in Cuba. This is the policy today. In practice, no major medical companies in the United States are willing to go through this process. It is a virtual ban.

Cuba tries to look elsewhere, but the U.S. blockade restricts other countries’ medical products as well. If a medical product is made outside of the United States, but over ten percent of the value of that medical product derives from U.S.-originated parts, components or technical processes, then the United States forbids the sale. If the sale happens, there will be repercussions for the seller. Because U.S. pharmaceutical and medical monopolies dominate the global market, Cuba’s access internationally to most medicines, supplies and new technologies is cruelly denied.

For example, state-of-the-art hearing aids and other equipment designed to help hearing-impaired people, like light bells and alarm clocks that vibrate for parents when a baby cries, are unavailable in Cuba because they have too many U.S. “components.”

The policies are even crueler in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. When Cuba tried to purchase life-saving mechanical pulmonary ventilators from two Swiss companies, IMT Medical AG and Acutronic Medical Systems AG, they were refused. Cuba had done business with them before, but a U.S.-based company bought them out, and now due to the blockade all commercial relations stopped.

5. Finances
Another main target of the U.S. blockade is Cuba’s banking and financial operations. To avoid U.S. fines and retaliation, foreign banks and financial institutions often refuse to process Cuban transactions or provide other services.

The primary system powering the world’s high-speed transactions between banks is a giant, U.S.-dominated financial messaging network called SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication.) SWIFT is how banks in one country transfer money to banks in another country. Forty percent of global transactions through SWIFT are in U.S. dollars. They must be cleared through U.S. banks, which gives the United States legal jurisdiction over them.

That means the United States dominates nearly half of all international transactions, and can use that position in the service of its foreign policy, including blockading countries. Thus, Cuba’s efforts to carry out financial transactions with third-countries through SWIFT are usually unsuccessful, making the simple task of paying for things enormously complicated.

In addition to this, in 2019, the U.S. government amended the Treasury Department’s rules for enforcing the blockade, affecting another kind of financial transaction: remittances. Remittances that are sent to Cuba by family members living in the United States constitute a major source of income for the country. Washington’s new restrictions are designed to cut them off.

Remittances are capped at $1,000 every four months. Remittances to non-family members have been terminated. Washington then put Fincimex, the Cuban financial institution which receives family remittances, on a blacklist, which means U.S. banks are prohibited from sending remittance payments to it. This move caused Western Union, the only U.S.-to-Cuba provider of remittance payments, to shut down its 407 locations across Cuba.

6. Tourism
The U.S. blockade, geared as it is towards bankrupting the Cuban state, targets tourism with special intensity because it is the country’s second-leading source of income. Tourism generates 500,000 jobs, or about one-in-ten jobs. Prior to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, when the Cuban government made a public health decision to suspend tourism, Washington was busy imposing new measures under the blockade to crush that vital industry.

In 2019, the U.S. government unveiled rules that end almost all non-family travel to Cuba, including “people-to-people” travel for educational and cultural reasons. Cruise ships, private and corporate aircraft, sailboats and fishing boats are prohibited from going to Cuba. Commercial and charter flights have been suspended to every city except Havana. In 2019 before the pandemic, 4.3 million tourists traveled to Cuba. In 2020, only 1.08 million visited the country and in the first six months of 2021 only 125,000 tourists arrived. For U.S. visitors who managed to enter the country, the U.S. government beffed up its blacklist of Cuban entities where it is illegal to make purchases and included 400 hotels as well as privately owned residences. All of this is designed to keep dollars out of the hands of Cuba.

—Liberation, July 19, 2021
On Sunday July 11, 2021, dozens of anti-government protests, apparently coordinated via social media, took place simultaneously throughout Cuba. In several places, including in San Antonio on the outskirts of Havana and in Matanzas, where COVID-19 cases have been surging, protests turned violent, with windows smashed, shops looted, cars overturned, rocks thrown, and people assaulted.

The international media has exaggerated and manipulated these events to depict mass opposition to the Cuban government, police repression of peaceful protests and a regime in crisis. Meanwhile, the role of external forces, the existence of a concerted social media war on Cuba, the pernicious impact of U.S. sanctions and the mobilization of thousands of Cubans in support of the revolutionary government have been deliberately downplayed or ignored.

In most of the Americas, including in the U.S., such social disturbances are common, and often involve serious casualties and multiple arrests. In Cuba, however, the last violent protest was the Maleconazo uprising in 1994—the worst year of the so-called “special period” of economic crisis in which Cuba’s GDP fell by 35 percent after the collapse of the socialist bloc which accounted for nearly 90 percent of Cuba’s trade. Hoping to push the country over the edge, the U.S. government enacted the Torricelli Act in 1992 and Helms Burton Act in 1996, tightening U.S. sanctions and obstructing Cuba’s trade with the rest of the world. While scarce resources were harnessed to prioritize welfare, Cubans faced shortages in every sector: food, fuel, medicines, housing, industry, transport, and so on. Life was tough.

These conditions are returning to Cuba today as a direct result of U.S. sanctions. Reversing Barack Obama’s tentative rapprochement, the Trump administration tightened the U.S. blockade to unprecedented levels, adding 243 new actions, measures and sanctions to cut off Cuba’s trade with the world, fine ships carrying fuel to Cuba, scare away foreign investors, block remittances and family visits, and prevent Cuba’s access to the international financial system which is dominated by U.S. dollars.

Over 50 of those coercive measures have been taken since the beginning of the pandemic, severely impacting Cuba’s capacity to import medical ventilators, spare parts, syringes, medicines and their raw materials, food and fuel. Even international donations of medical supplies to Cuba are blocked. This creates an agonizing dichotomy: thousands of Cuban medical specialists have treated COVID-19 patients in 40 countries and the island of Cuba has the only domestically developed COVID-19 vaccines in Latin America, and yet Cubans face exhausting daily queues for basic goods. Their frustration should not surprise anyone.

With the combined impact of sanctions and the pandemic, Cuba’s GDP fell by 11 percent in 2020; tourism fell 75 percent and imports fell 30 percent compared to 2019, hence the unfilled shelves and long queues. At the same time, the social media campaign, oiled with millions of U.S. Congress-approved dollars and orchestrated from Miami, blames the Cuban government for these hardships and dismisses U.S. sanctions as an excuse or a lie. It seeks to channel the Cuban people’s frustrations into political opposition.

Since late 2020, Miami-based social media “influencers” and YouTubers have urged Cubans to take to the
streets, with some even offering money, or phone credit, to anyone who carries out, films and uploads acts of violent disorder and arson.

At an international press conference on July 13, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez presented evidence of a new media campaign. On June 15, the hashtag #SOSCuba was launched by a U.S. company, the same day it was authorized to receive state funding. On July 5, hashtags appeared calling for a “humanitarian corridor” in Cuba, with bots and troll farms being used to disseminate messages on Twitter through fake accounts—one doing five retweets per second on July 10 and 11. Twitter users changed their geolocations to look like they were in Cuba, and images of both a huge protest in Egypt and of Argentinians celebrating their America Cup victory were credited as mass mobilizations in Havana. The following Friday, a video claiming to show Cuban police shooting a man dead at his home was exposed by Cuban media when the same man was interviewed in good health.

The Trump sanctions and the social media war are the contemporary versions of the “two-track” policy pursued by the U.S. since the Cuban Revolution: economic sanctions and the promotion of an internal opposition. The objective is “regime change,” as articulated in the secret memorandum of April 6, 1960 written by Lester Mallory, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Recognizing popular support for the revolutionary government, he advised measures to “weaken the economic life of Cuba […] to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”

Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel responded to events on July 11 in a similar manner to Fidel Castro during the Maleconazo in 1994. He went to San Antonio to speak to local people, recognized their legitimate frustrations, and then led a march through the community in defense of the Cuban Revolution. Hours later, he appeared on television to inform the public about the events, acknowledge Cubans’ daily difficulties and give a fervent denunciation of U.S. imperialism and the social media campaign. He declared: “The streets belong to the revolutionaries!” At that signal, thousands of Cubans mobilized in towns and cities around the country to defend Cuban socialism.

The following days have seen a tense calm, with one violent protest in Arroyo Naranjo on the outskirts of Havana in which one person died and more sustained injuries, including police. Small skirmishes have taken place since. Internet access was temporarily suspended, presumably to prevent social media being used to coordinate more protests. Car radios and workplace televisions were tuned into a four-hour broadcast by the president and government ministers who discussed the events, analyzed the country’s situation, and denounced U.S. intervention. From Florida, there were threats of a naval flotilla and calls for military intervention.

With mind-boggling hypocrisy, Joe Biden expressed his concern about the situation, and called on the Cuban government to listen to the people. But if Biden were actually concerned, and listening to the Cuban people, he would lift the sanctions. This was a demand I heard from every Cuban I spoke to at a rally of 200,000 in Havana on July 17, when hundreds-of-thousands took to the streets around the island.

Cuban authorities have made it clear that violent disorder will be punished through the legal system. There may be more conflict ahead, but as the lines are drawn, no-one should underestimate the resilience of the Cuban Revolution.

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Chicago, IL—Noam Chomsky, Gilbert Achcar, Paul Le Blanc, Suzi Weissman, Tithi Bhattacharya, Charlie Post, Robert Brenner, Gayatri Spivak, Alex Callinicos, Ashley Smith, Eric Toussaint, Marc Cooper, Etienne Balibar. These are a handful of the over 500 signatories on an open letter directed to the blockaded Cuban government on July 12 demanding “respect for the democratic rights of all Cuban people” and the release of “dissident Marxist” Frank García Hernández and his comrades from jail after the protests of July 11.

These signatories are high-profile academic socialists in the U.S. and Europe, featured prominently in the publication catalogue of Verso and Haymarket Books, or on the editorial boards of online journals like New Politics, Tempest, Spectre, Socialist Worker, and other ex-International Socialist Organization (ISO)-now-Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Socialist Equality Party, or UK Socialist workers Party related outlets. Their work also frequently appears in more mainstream left outlets, such as Jacobin and the Nation. Their opinions on the left reach a wide audience and, in some cases, carry significant weight.

When the mayor of Miami called on the U.S. government to bomb Havana, none of the open letter endorsers change their tune. None came to the defense of Black Lives Matter after the organization’s condemnation of the U.S. blockade brought them heavy backlash.

Their petition circulation effort drew major support on social media in the days after the initial protests in Cuba, helping to stitch together a left-reinforcement to the edifice of the mainstream press, which described the event as an uprising by “political dissidents” against an “oppressive bureaucratic regime” in the pursuit of democracy and freedom of expression. The definition of “freedom” pursued and the political orientation of the protesters in question differed between the tales spun by the New York Times and those of the Socialist Worker, but the story was the same: Repressive government arbitrarily detains political dissidents.

And while these signatories differ among themselves over their characterization of the Cuban government and its revolutionary tradition—rang-

ing from the view that Cuba is a “state capitalist” that harbors no revolutionary potential to the view that the once-revolutionary state has become an intransigent bureaucracy that is still preferable to the neoliberal model—all seem to find common ground with co-signer Gilbert Achcar’s warning about “the anti-imperialism of fools.”

Achcar condemns those who oppose U.S. imperialism no matter its target, because he believes this misses the “nuanced” view that U.S. imperialism might be instrumentalized by popular movements in the pursuit of their own liberation. Our “knee-jerk” rejection of the notion that any positive could ever come from the machinations of empire, in Achcar’s formulation, puts us in the camp of “defending murderous regimes.” Ostensibly, sharing co-signature real estate with the likes of Achcar would suggest that the other petitioners agree with him that anti-imperialism is not always a principled position and the events in Cuba are an example of a situation in which they do not want to end up on the side of “fools.” So, without further investigation, they and 500 others signed an open letter condemning the Cuban government for its “repression and arbitrary detentions” of “critical communists.”

An alternate view from the ground

On July 17, a different narrative emerged from the mouths of Frank García Hernández’s Cuban colleagues themselves. The Comunistas collective Editorial Board, of which García Hernández is a founder, published an account of events that was much more balanced and far less negative in its appraisal of the Cuban government and its response to the protests than the narrative that was promoted by the petition’s signatories. Rather than a

Cuban cartoon lampooning foreign support for counter revolutionaries.
repressive response to an organic anti-state uprising, they portray the events of July 11 as unprecedented protests with a variety of origins and compositions, some legitimate and others manufactured. In their account, the protests were composed of three flanks: a small group of U.S.-funded counterrevolutionaries with massive reach and influence, a small group of anti-state intellectuals with legitimate grievances that were co-opted by the reactionaries, and a much larger group of “non-political” demonstrators demanding an end to austerity and shortages a crisis which the Comunistas Editorial Board attributes, with some reservations, almost entirely to the exacerbating U.S. blockade and global pandemic. In short, the most explicitly anti-government slogans and orientations were crafted and carried by the U.S.-funded counterrevolutionaries, whereas the majority of the demonstrators lacked a cohesive political consciousness and simply wanted a reprieve from their very real material hardships. As the Editorial Board asserts, “The protests did not represent a majority. Most of the Cuban population continues to support the government.”

Notably, this closely mirrors the public address of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who stated, “The protests involve many revolutionary citizens who want an explanation for the current situation in the country, but are also contaminated by groups of opportunists who take advantage of the current crisis to undermine order and generate chaos.” And while Díaz-Canel expressed full faith in the Cuban people to engage in productive dialogue to resolve the present crises, his calls for revolutionaries to take to the streets to defend the nation against opportunistic attacks and U.S.-financed subversion campaigns was met with scorn from the self-described “anti-campist” or “third campist” Western left.

For these Western left critics of the Cuban state, Díaz-Canel’s calls for popular defense of national sovereignty represented a cynical demand by the Cuban state for its supporters to engage in vigilante violence against dissidents like Frank García Hernández. The fact that Frank’s comrades—who engage in frequent criticism of the Cuban government themselves—did not subscribe to this narrative of events nevertheless did not discourage the petitioners from propagating the perspective that Frank García Hernández’s arrest was the smoking gun evidence of Cuba’s authoritarian roundup of “critical communists.”

They did not collectively come to the defense of a patriotic Cuban woman who was censored on Twitter after she demanded that the UN Human Rights Council stop using her image as the symbol for the anti-government protesters, when, in reality, she was in the streets of Cuba defending her revolution.

Arbitrary detention or safeguarding the revolution?

No such roundup took place. The arrests that did occur followed outbreaks of violence and vandalism after mostly peaceful and unharassed protests in a number of cities, which the Comunistas collective describes as: “Violent groups carried out acts of vandalism, attacking communist militants and government supporters with sticks and stones.” The Cuban police and defenders of the revolution engaged in kind. In other words, according to this collective of Cuban critics of the state, the violence was largely carried out by counterrevolutionary forces against government supporters and other communist partisans. This resulted in scattered arrests.

This is a far cry from the narratives emerging out of the U.S. corporate media and academic left circles, which characterized the violence as a one-sided repressive crackdown by an intransigent bureaucratic “regime” and its paid supporters against dissidents striving for freedom and plenty.

Nevertheless, Frank García Hernández and some others were arrested—the catalyst for the petition. Frank’s comrades at the Comunistas collective address this too. It turns out, García Hernández was not arrested for being a “dissident” participant in the protests. In fact, García Hernández is a member of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) who merely watched but did not partake in the protests and was arrested by “confusion” as he put it. Frank García Hernández and another intellectual named in the petition, LGBTQ activist Maykel González Vivero, who did participate in the protests, were picked up after a nearby act of counterrevolutionary violence resulted in injuries and vandalism late in the night. By García Hernández’s own admission, they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. The next day they easily proved their innocence and were released without incident. According to his colleagues at Comunistas collective, “During his little more than 24-hours of detention, Frank affirms that he did not receive physical abuse, nor any type of torture.” No other person associated with the publication was arrested or targeted.

But here a key detail emerges. Frank’s release actually preceded the publication of the open letter demanding his release by his “comrades” in the U.S. and Europe. And while Comunistas
collective maintained their own criticisms of the Cuban government, their characterization of the genesis of the protests, the response of the government to the protests, and the appraisal of the revolutionary process in general, differ significantly from the ostensibly “progressive” critics of the Cuban government in the U.S. and Europe who organized the petition to release their friend who had in fact already been released. Again, these significant discrepancies have not been addressed by any of the prominent signatories and circulating of the petition.

In fact, on July 17, the day that the Comunistas blog collective published their retrospective of the protests and arrests, some of the U.S.-based petition endorsers republished the original petition in Tempest Magazine without mention of any of the above critical divergences from on-the-ground reports. Further, the editorial board of Tempest broadened the appeal to a call for the release of “all detainees in Cuba.” Even the Comunistas collective demanded only the release of the detainees “as long as they have not committed actions that have threatened the lives of other people.”

In the week that followed the July 11 protests, the Open Letter left were confronted with an excess of evidence and investigative research documenting the existence of U.S. alphabet agency subversion projects, tens-of-millions-of-dollars funneled into counter-revolutionary activities, coup-propagating social media bot farms and other examples of hybrid warfare that served as the backdrop of the unrest. And yet, they maintained their political line that all arrests were arbitrary and illegitimate. One signatory even asserted that the duty of the left in the West is to support all such protests, “whatever people’s politics involved in these struggles—against whatever states and ruling classes, even those who falsely claim the mantle of socialism.” This is, of course, a tacit endorsement of the reactionary tail that wags the dog of these astro-turfed “color revolutions,” disguised as they are as organic movements of workers and oppressed peoples.

As progressives and revolutionaries living within the empire, we must express an unqualified and unwavering solidarity with Cuba and all targets of U.S. imperialism, and we must organize to put an end to U.S. aggression, political interference and economic strangulation so that Cuba and all working and oppressed peoples of the world can breathe.

Whither opposition to empire?

Taken in isolation, a charitable reading could view signing such an open letter as a political slip-up brewed in the fog of war that is a developing foreign event. But for many of the most prominent left signatories, this was the only public statement or call to action made regarding the unprecedented events in Cuba. Too few matched their outrage of the arrests with equal outrage over the ongoing illegal blockade of the island by the U.S., and even fewer (close to none) circulated open letters or petitions calling for anti-imperialist solidarity with Cuban sovereignty against the now well-documented imperialist provocations that played an important role in the outbreak and international media coverage of the protests in Cuba.

Even after statements of support for the gains of the Cuban revolution came from all corners of the world, demanding an end to the illegal blockade and hybrid warfare, the signatories spared little attention for the very real threat of escalating imperialist intervention. When the mayor of Miami called on the U.S. government to bomb Havana, none of the open letter endorsers change their tune. None came to the defense of Black Lives Matter after the organization’s condemnation of the U.S. blockade brought them heavy backlash. At most, as in the petition itself, the blockade and imperial provocations were mentioned as an almost unrelated preamble to the real point, despite their absolute centrality. No open letter was signed and circulated by this group of Western academic leftists demanding an end to the blockade after the 29th consecutive UN General Assembly majority vote to end the economic siege in June, and neither was there an effort on their part to circulate the campaign to send millions of much-needed syringes to the island to help put Cuban-made COVID vaccines into Cuban arms. When President Joe Biden announced that he would not change course on Cuba and called the nation a “failed state” without reference to the blockade, they issued no scathing open letter. They did not collectively come to the defense of a patriotic Cuban woman who was censored on Twitter after she demanded that the UN Human Rights Council stop using her image as the symbol for the anti-government protesters, when, in reality, she was in the streets of Cuba defending her revolution. Similarly, their silences on the ongoing violent U.S.-backed state repression of a months-long popular uprising in Colombia, or the years-long popular uprising in Haiti, grew more pronounced with the circulation of this petition. Their priorities were laid bare.

When confronted on social media about this unfortunate discrepancy
between stated ideological commitments and real political actions, many of these prominent signatories responded by blocking, unfriending, ignoring, or dismissing criticisms and questions. When they did respond, it was often full of slanders against “tankies” and “Stalinists” and strangely even one reference to Assad. Those that disagreed were accused of supporting “repression” and “ignoring voices on the ground.” No intellectually honest reference was made to the voices on the ground of the 100,000 Cubans who took to the streets of Havana in defense of their revolution. No mea culpas were issued after even Reuters was forced to admit that the media had fallen for lies and manipulations about the protests and the repression that ostensibly followed. Their perception of events, one must assume, remains the same as it was on July 12. Their own political orthodoxy, it seems, left little room for “dissident Marxists” engaging them in criticism among comrades.

On July 22, U.S. President Joe Biden announced a new round of sanctions on Cuba, which he promised were “just the beginning.” The Biden administration’s intransigence—and its cynical hypocrisy in denouncing “mass detentions and sham trials” in Cuba that presumably does not describe the U.S.-run torture camp known as Guantanamo Bay—saw a rapidly organized response in the pages of the New York Times on July 23. In a full-page advert, the People’s Forum, Code Pink, the ANSWER Coalition and over 400 “former heads of state, politicians, intellectuals, scientists, members of the clergy, artists, musicians and activists from across the globe,” issued an open letter to the U.S. government demanding the end to its economic warfare against the Cuban people. Here is an example of the kind of public statement with prominent endorsers that places the responsibility for human rights abuses at the feet of U.S. imperialism and that expresses solidarity with the working and oppressed people of the globe who resist empire. A rare few signatories of the July 12 petition directed against the Cuban government did sign the “Let Cuba Live” letter in the New York Times, including Noam Chomsky. One can only wonder what the political priorities are of those who condemn the imperialism of their own government only after first making demands and criticisms upon the targets of that imperialism.

Beware the “anti-anti-imperialist left”

File this away as one more example of Western academic socialists and progressives being captured by the ideological manipulations of U.S. State Department propaganda and their own internalized colonial chauvinism toward revolutionary projects in the Global South. Other targets of these petitions and open letters in recent years and months have been Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia. Notably, all are targets of ongoing and well-documented subversion operations, economic sanctions and electoral interference by the United States, something that is rarely remarked upon by the signatories. The outraged open letter from prominent leftist intellectuals making demands upon anti-imperialist counties and other targets of Western imperialism is one of the most insidious and effective propaganda efforts by non-state actors in the imperial core, as it serves to confuse and disorient the broader left within the belly of the beast, weakening our capacity to collectively undermine and resist the U.S. empire, thus relegating the burden of the struggle against imperialism to the revolutionary peoples of the Global South alone. This is a dereliction of our revolutionary duties.

As progressives and revolutionaries living within the empire, we must express an unqualified and unwavering solidarity with Cuba and all targets of U.S. imperialism, and we must organize to put an end to U.S. aggression, political interference and economic strangulation so that Cuba and all working and oppressed peoples of the world can breathe.

—FightBack! News, July 26, 2021

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign calls on the U.S. government to suspend the blockade of Cuba to allow emergency medical and humanitarian aid into the country in order to ease the economic and health crisis the island is experiencing.

The current emergency is a result of the ongoing U.S. blockade, an additional 243 sanctions imposed by the Trump administration, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cuba has shown incredible resilience in the face of six decades of economic warfare by the U.S. government in the form of a blockade intended to strangle the economy and create hunger and hardship in an attempt to destabilize the country.

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign opposes any calls for foreign intervention coming from those in the U.S. who seek to exploit the current difficulties and provoke unrest. The solution to the challenges Cuba faces must be resolved by the people of Cuba and we support the efforts that the Cuban people and their government are making to fight the pandemic in the face of ongoing sanctions and provocations from the U.S.

On Sunday July 11, some street protests took place against the scarcity of food, medicines and power supplies. The vast majority of these protesters have genuine concerns regarding these shortages. President Miguel Díaz-Canel travelled to San Antonio de los Baños, site of the original demonstration, and spoke to people about their grievances.

Some groups are seeking to exploit and provoke this difficult situation. They called for people to protest in other locations, resulting in protests in some towns and cities. In response, thousands of Cubans supporting the government have taken to the streets across the island in counter-demonstrations against U.S. interference.

Now right-wing, pro-blockade, and regime-change politicians and groups in the U.S. are also seeking to manipulate the situation. They have called for a so-called “humanitarian corridor” (a pretext for U.S. intervention) to be set up. Anyone genuinely interested in helping the Cuban people at this time should instead be calling for the U.S. government to ease the crippling sanctions.

The calls for U.S. aid delivered through a U.S.-imposed “humanitarian corridor” are disingenuous and fraudulent. These are the same people who hypocritically call for humanitarian intervention while supporting blockade policies which have caused shortages of food, fuel and medicines.

CSC condemns those in the U.S. and internationally who are cynically using the situation to destabilize Cuba, and supports Cuba’s right to self-determination.

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign appeals to the Biden administration to observe the recent United Nations General Assembly vote on June 23, 2021 which voted 184 to 2 for an end to the blockade of Cuba. It is immoral and dangerous to seek to exploit the current struggles of the Cuban people to serve the political objectives of a few hardliners in Miami.

Genuine efforts to support the Cuban people are welcome. Individuals and organizations can directly help by...
becoming members of CSC. Donations can also be made to CSC’s COVID-19 Medical Appeal.¹

In recent days Cuba has experienced its worst increase in COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, with a severe outbreak in the Matanzas province which has stretched capacity in hospitals and isolation centers to the limit. Five hundred medics from other parts of the country have been deployed in the province to help. It is important to note that while the situation is severe, the numbers of cases and deaths are far below those in most other countries of the region including the United States itself which as of July 10 had a death rate of 1,870 per million compared to Cuba’s 139 per million.

At the same time Cuba is in the midst of its most severe economic crisis in more than thirty years. The sixty-year-old U.S. blockade was tightened by the Trump administration by imposing 243 extra sanctions—all of which remain in place. These measures had already resulted in grave food, medical and fuel shortages before the pandemic struck. In addition, increasing numbers of banks are refusing to transfer funds to Cuba for fear of U.S. fines, and it is now almost impossible for Cubans living abroad to transfer money to family on the island. With the onset of COVID-19, Cuba has also lost vital income from international tourism, which was down 94 percent in the first four months of 2021.

Fuel shortages are causing many power cuts, which in the height of summer mean that air conditioning and fridges don’t work. There are long queues for food, medicines and basic goods. Without doubt the Cuban people are experiencing incredible hardship. People with friends or family in Cuba will have heard how difficult things are.

Last year the U.S. blockade even prevented delivery of a consignment of COVID-19 medical aid for Cuba, including PPE, ventilators, and testing equipment. Despite having two home-grown vaccines, Cuba’s vaccination roll-out program is hindered by a lack of syringes and raw materials as a direct result of the blockade. Solidarity organizations around the world have had funding sites raising money for COVID-19 medical aid closed down because of blockade measures. CSC itself receives numerous enquiries from people who can’t find a way to transfer money to friends and family in Cuba. Meanwhile, the U.S. government spends millions of dollars every year on so-called “democracy promotion” on the island, funding groups and individuals who work undercover attempting to build U.S.-supported opposition.

If those calling for humanitarian aid to Cuba were genuine in their intentions, they would start with calling for the blockade to be lifted to allow medical and other supplies to be sent to Cuba. However, their true objectives are those of the blockade itself. As the infamous U.S. State Department memorandum on the blockade of 1960 laid out:

“The only foreseeable means of alienating internal support is through disenchantment and disaffection based on economic dissatisfaction and hardship… every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba… a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible, makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”

—Cuba Solidarity Campaign, July 12, 2021

¹ https://cuba-solidarity.org.uk/emergency-appeal-for-cuba/

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Eye-Witness Account of U.S. Attempts to Destabilize Cuba

BY KATHRYN GUERRERA

As a Canadian with family members that live in Cuba, who was in Cuba during the anti-government protests that occurred on July 11, I found myself in a unique and disturbing position where I could see and feel the disconnect between what was being reported by the mainstream media back home and what was really happening on the ground in Cuba.

Approximately two weeks after Father’s Day, the COVID-19 Delta variant began to take hold, particularly in the province of Matanzas. Mother’s Day and Father’s Day are important social celebrations in Cuban culture and, coupled with the level of contagion of the Delta variant, this led to a rapid escalation in new COVID-19 cases. Cuba had recently fully vaccinated a large portion of the population in La Habana province with their first approved vaccine candidate, Abdala.

From there, the Cuban Ministry of Health (MINSAP) began focusing on Matanzas because it is the most popular province for tourism, and this puts the population there more at risk. Abdala has an efficacy rate of 92 percent, putting it in the same league as the most effective vaccines, BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna.

At the same time that the number of daily reported new COVID-19 cases
was spiking, we began hearing from many friends in the city of Cárdenas, Matanzas (a current hotspot for COVID-19) that their vaccination appointments were being cancelled due to a lack of syringes and needles. The government responded swiftly with a lockdown, allowing stores to only be open in the mornings so that people would be at home for the rest of the day. At the same time, the number of hospital admissions was increasing and health care workers and the hospital infrastructure itself were becoming overwhelmed. A large electrical power plant in Matanzas was operating at reduced capacity due to outstanding maintenance (the U.S. blockade affects Cuba’s ability to import parts and supplies) and the government had to resort to rationing electricity to households in order to keep people in the hospitals alive. This meant only a few hours-per-day to cook or turn on your fan or air conditioner in the July heat. No public pools were open and going to the beach was not permitted due to the lockdown.

So, nearly a year-and-a-half into the pandemic and economic crisis, you can imagine the heightened level of frustration, fatigue, and despair.

Since the onset of the pandemic, Cuba’s GDP has rapidly fallen by over 11 percent. The economy was already struggling before the pandemic. Since the Donald Trump administration tightened sanctions from 2017 to 2020, Cuban exports fell by 82 percent and imports by 85 percent. Trump attacked Cuba’s sources of currency, cutting back commercial flights, and eventually even banning charter flights in the summer of 2020. The U.S. also imposed sanctions on tanker companies that delivered petroleum from Venezuela to Cuba which affected movement and logistics on the island.

With the huge losses to the tourism sector in 2020 because of the pandemic, the island has lost one of its most important sources of hard currency, plunging it into one of the worst food shortages since the Special Period in the 1990s. Basic hygiene products have become increasingly difficult for Cubans to find in stores—as have over-the-counter medications like Tylenol, Advil and antibiotic ointments. Pharmacies now lack vital prescription medications for manageable conditions like hypertension, diabetes, and cancer as well as treatable, but potentially harmful infections. A 250-tablet bottle of Acetaminophen costs $50 USD or more on the underground market.

With many medications currently unavailable, scarce and expensive personal hygiene products and two to three-hour lineups for groceries with a 50/50 chance the store will run out that day before you make it inside, the Cuban people are suffering and generally exasperated and miserable under the current conditions. This is exactly what the sanctions are designed to do.

At the beginning of July, in response to the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Matanzas province, we started seeing the #SOS Cuba hashtag coming from Cuban American celebrities living in South Florida. This was less than three weeks after the Abdala vaccine was found to contend with the top vaccines in the world (with Soberana, Cuba’s second candidate vaccine, not far behind) and right after 184 countries voted at the United Nations for the U.S. to end the blockade. The #SOS Cuba hashtag was an obvious smear campaign and meant to spread the idea that the Cuban government has “mismanaged” the pandemic.

Miami is home to 1.2 million people of Cuban heritage—many of whom are descendants of exiles that fled the Revolution. They have strong counter-revolutionary and anti-communist views and constitute a wealthy and politically powerful community. There is a multimillion-dollar counterrevolutionary industry based in South Florida with politicians, YouTubers, actors, and artists whose entire careers are propped up by telling lies about the Cuban government and lobbying Washington to maintain and tighten its blockade. Tens-of-millions of dollars are spent every year by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID to fund “democracy” projects in Cuba. This is code for funding political interference, fake journalism, dissenters, and protestors—all to promote regime change.

Fakes, bots, and payoffs

After the anti-government protests, Spanish social media expert Julian Macias Tovar, spoke on the Cuban television news show Mesa Redonda (Roundtable) and explained that the figures around the #SOS Cuba hashtag

In response to U.S. provocation, thousands of Cubans rallied across the island on July 11 in support of their Revolution and government.
are more than a little odd. Macías Tovar stated that between July 5, when the hashtag was first used, and July 8, there were just 5,000 tweets. This figure then exploded exponentially with 100,000 Tweets on July 9, 500,000 on July 10, 1.5 million the next day and two million on the July 12. Cuban TV journalists did an excellent job debunking the lies and fake photos and videos around the protests as they were being created and disseminated to keep Cubans correctly informed. Unfortunately, of course, this was not seen by anyone outside of Cuba. We now know that thousands of fake social media accounts were created in the days leading up to the protests and that bots were used to send out thousands of tweets per day and hundreds of retweets per minute on July 10 and 11. The purpose was to tarnish the Cuban government’s reputation and to prepare and encourage anti-government demonstrations.

On July 11, there were not thousands of anti-government protestors in any Cuban city at any point in time. There were barely hundreds in a country of over 11 million people.

In Cárdenas, where I was, the participants were not working professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, lawyers, licensed business owners or workers in factories or the tourism sector. Most of the protesters were those who choose to be unemployed and live off remittances from family living abroad. Many are well-known delinquents and are not positive contributors to the community. We personally know of the woman and her husband who created a widely circulated and entirely fake video—using pig’s blood and tomato sauce—of a Cuban police officer shooting their child. The couple confessed to being offered “Moneda Librement Convirtible” (MLC, meaning freely convertible money rather than Cuban pesos) from someone in the United States to do this. Another individual, who was also offered money to participate in the Cárdenas protest, created a staged video and has a history in town of running an illegal, unlicensed business and not paying taxes.

With many medications currently unavailable, scarce and expensive personal hygiene products and two to three-hour lineups for groceries with a 50/50 chance the store will run out that day before you make it inside, the Cuban people are suffering and generally exasperated and miserable under the current conditions. This is exactly what the sanctions are designed to do.

Protest participants are generally not respected in the community and are not known for their civic engagement. Nor do they seem to be interested in peaceful dialogue with the government. Compensation appears to be their primary motivating factors. These anti-government protests were also not ongoing as mainstream media claimed in the days that followed.

I want to note that most Cuban police officers do not have guns with bullets. They usually have blank guns, similar to starting pistols, that merely emit smoke and sound. There were multiple false claims on social media and in the Western mainstream media of police murdering Cuban adults and youth—especially people of color. Many of these “deceased” people later went on Cuban public television to prove that they were in fact alive and well.

The Cárdenas protests were not characterized by police brutality and there are no missing people. There were however stores completely trashed by rioters who threw rocks through windows and at unarmed police officers, toppled police vehicles and stole things like kitchen stoves and electronics. To make matters worse, some individuals even went into the Cárdenas hospital and vandalized the pediatric ward. Healthcare workers reportedly needed police to provide security from these rioters who were threatening them.

Several protestors, after demolishing stores and the hospital ward, gathered at Cárdenas Bay where they expected boats from Florida that would take them to the United States. They themselves were victims of U.S. lies and manipulation—no boats came to take them away and most have been arrested for clear-cut violations of the law. Many of them have already gone public with the communications they received from abroad that offered to transfer MLC to their bank account if they carried out destructive or deceptive tasks to create civil unrest, provoke law enforcement and fabricate videos or make false claims to foreign media and on social media. The Western mainstream media has not reported on this.

The Western media has also not given enough attention to significant human rights violations by governments and paramilitary forces in countries like Colombia, Chile and Haiti where massive anti-government uprisings have occurred and hundreds of civilians have been abused, murdered, or gone missing. But the same media was instantly ready to cover, exaggerate and downright lie about what happened in Cuba. Politicians in the U.S. immediately called for “humanitarian” or military intervention in Cuba—including airstrikes. Media in the United States, Canada and other
President Biden has not only kept all of Trump’s sanctions designed to severely harm the Cuban people, he has added two more.

His response to the July 11 protests in Cuba was to call for the overthrow of the socialist Cuban Revolution.

The July 11 protests of the Cuban government were wildly misrepresented in the major media in the U.S.

The way they were portrayed on TV would lead one to think they were tens-of-thousands strong. More sober on the spot estimates put the figure at hundreds, except in Havana at 2,000-3,000.

According to reports from different reliable sources, they were composed of three main elements: counterrevolutionaries calling for the overthrow of the Revolution, small groups of intellectuals protesting restrictions on artistic freedom, and working-class people demanding that the government improve their living conditions.

The big majority of protesters were in the third category, and were not linked to the counter-revolutionary organizations (financed by the United States), nor were they led by them.

Without going further into what happened during the protests, they brought to light the severe economic hardships the Cuban people are suffering, including shortages of food and medicines, in the context of an economic crises exacerbated by the worldwide downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The working-class protesters were driven by the deterioration in their living conditions. They were mistaken in thinking that the culprit was the government, whatever its shortcomings.

Most of the socialist and broader left in the U.S. including Black Lives Matter has put its finger on the real culprit: the U.S. economic blockade of Cuba and the sanctions imposed on the Cuban...
economy, especially the new ones imposed by Donald Trump that Biden supports which are designed to starve the Cuban people into submission.

The 60-year-old blockade of Cuba was first put in place right after the Cuban revolution began to carry out its promise of land reform, which confiscated the large landholdings of U.S. firms like the United Fruit Company.

U.S. imperialism had made the production of sugar the main pillar of the island’s economy, and that was controlled mostly by United Fruit.

The blockade was intensified as the revolution soon deepened into a socialist revolution that confiscated all the companies owned by U.S. and Cuban capitalists.

Without going into the whole history of the blockade and resistance to it, including after the overthrow of the Soviet Union, there was an opening toward Cuba under the Obama administration.

In 2014, Obama initiated a shift away from sanctions and toward a normalization of relations. These included the repeal of the ridiculous designation of Cuba as a terrorist state, and the restoration of diplomatic relations.

Then there was an easing of restrictions on travel and remittances of money Cuban-Americans could send to relatives on the island, as well as on trade, telecommunications, banking and financial services.

The restoration of diplomatic relations led to increased government-to-government engagement, with over 20 agreements and numerous dialogs on issues between the U.S. and Cuba.

Trump in 2017, his first year in office, jettisoned Obama’s opening, and imposed new sanctions on the Cuban economy, which were increased each year. In 2019 sanctions were imposed on shipping companies and vessels that transported oil from Venezuela to Cuba and the Cuban oil import-export company, a big setback.

In the same year, a cap of $1,000-per-quarter of each year was placed on remittances, and then the threat of sanctions forced Western Union to stop processing all remittances, effectively cancelling them.

He eliminated people-to-people educational travel, and prohibited cruise ships, private corporate aircraft, sailboats and fishing boats from going to Cuba.

Commercial flights to Cuba were suspended to cities other than Havana. U.S. travelers to Cuba were barred from staying at 400 hotels which visitors often used, or in private residences of Cuban officials.

This is just a partial list.

One effect of Trump’s actions was to cripple tourism, a major source of income for Cuba, then made worse by the pandemic.

On January 11, 2021, just before Biden look office, Trump placed an additional 243 sanctions on Cuba, the full extent of which is unknown.

Included was placing Cuba back on the list of terrorist states, further limiting trade, placing Cuba on its most restrictive export-licensing list, threatening other countries with sanctions, all of which had its desired effect of blocking most trade with Cuba.

These new restrictions have been so severe that medical supplies and food are now scarce. Cuba had been a leader internationally on dealing with the virus, even developing its own vaccines. But now its vaccination program has been stalled by lack of medical supplies, including syringes.

Washington is not just attempting to starve Cubans into submission but also to make them sick for the same purpose.

Biden had promised during his presidential campaign to lift Trump’s sanctions, but he hasn’t even reversed Trump’s January 11 actions, and has added to them.

It is clear that Washington will not go back to the kind of opening Obama made, but the opposite.

Biden’s budget proposals now before Congress include $20 million for backing counterrevolutionary groups in Cuba, and other efforts at destabilizing the regime. Another $13 million is authorized for broadcasting U.S. propaganda of the type that shifted blame for Cuba’s economic crisis from the U.S. blockade and sanctions.

Many Cubans can get these broadcasts.

Elementary humanity, let alone opposition to U.S. imperialism and for democracy, demands that the U.S. blockade and sanctions be lifted now!

Let the Cuban people live!
Events are happening very fast in the world today but perhaps none faster than the rapid advance of the Taliban and the fall of the U.S. puppet regime in Afghanistan. It is reported that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani fled the country with four cars and a helicopter full of cash.

Perhaps we were not prepared for the rapid fall of the U.S. supported Afghan government and forces because we have not been told the truth throughout the 20-year occupation and war. The U.S. supposedly went into Afghanistan to capture Osama Bin Laden who they held responsible for the attacks on 9/11. The Taliban government said they would turn him over to an international court if shown proof of his involvement, but rather than do that, the U.S. attacked and occupied the country and turned the government over to a group of war lords from the Northern Alliance. That was supposed to bring democracy to Afghanistan. Twenty years later the Taliban has returned stronger than ever.

It has to be clear that the Taliban have a lot of support in Afghanistan because they took the entire country at lightning speed. They have no Air Force, no advanced weaponry or intelligence. The Taliban are not from outside the country, they are a homegrown movement. So why do they have such support? The answer is that they have been the main force in the country that has been resisting the occupation of the U.S. and its Western allies, and the Afghan people, like all people, do not like to be occupied. The last 20 years have been hell for the Afghan people. Around 240,000 have been killed, there have been massive numbers of drone strikes and bombings. Black sites for torture such as Bagram Air Base were created. Opium production skyrocketed under the U.S. occupation and 72 percent for the population lived at or below the poverty level. In a survey reported by the Associated Press in January 2020, only 33 percent of the people surveyed wanted the U.S. to stay in their country. In another poll, 80 percent of Afghans said they feel fear when encountering the foreign occupation forces.

There has been a lot of talk about the puppet government supporting women's rights, but this is a sham. According to Afghan activist, Malalai Joya, speaking on Democracy Now in July, “the catastrophic situation of the women of Afghanistan was a very good excuse for U.S. and NATO to occupy our country. Unfortunately, they pushed us from the frying pan into the fire as they replaced the barbaric regime of the Taliban with the misogynist war lords... That’s why today millions of Afghans are suffering from insecurity, corruption, joblessness, poverty. And still, most of Afghan women are the victims.” Several years ago, the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) organized a U.S. tour for Malalai Joya.

The U.S. was never in Afghanistan to fight terrorism or to bring a better life for the Afghan people, they were there to install a pro-U.S. government that would support their strategic political and military goals in the region including their aggression against China and Iran. Additionally, they wanted to get their hands on the vast mineral resources in Afghanistan. If the U.S. was interested in helping people in other countries, they would not be supporting despotic regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, Haiti, Columbia, Israel, and many others.

Now that the U.S. has been defeated in Afghanistan, we can be sure that they will impose additional sanctions to make the people of that country suffer more and push for a regime change through which they can start the entire process over again. The continued U.S. bombing in areas that fell to the Taliban was responsible for the killing of many civilians causing people to flee and the
destruction of schools and health centers. We must demand: No more bombing, remove all troops, mercenaries, and special forces from the country and the surrounding area, no sanctions, and pay reparations for the destruction caused by their war and occupation. The people of Afghanistan must find their own way free from U.S. intervention.

Joe Lombardo is an antiwar activist and coordinator of the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC).

—UNAC, August 16, 2021
https://nepajac.org/afghanistan.htm

“the catastrophic situation of the women of Afghanistan was a very good excuse for U.S. and NATO to occupy our country. Unfortunately, they pushed us from the frying pan into the fire as they replaced the barbaric regime of the Taliban with the misogynist warlords... That’s why today millions of Afghans are suffering from insecurity, corruption, joblessness, poverty. And still, most of Afghan women are the victims.”

Afghanistan: The Cynical Betrayal of U.S. Imperialism
By Hamid Alizadeh

America’s longest war has ended in abject shame and humiliation for U.S. imperialism. Twenty years after the invasion of Afghanistan, the most powerful military force the world has ever known has been dealt total defeat at the hands of a band of primitive religious zealots.

The fall of Kabul marked the end of a seven-day blitz in which Taliban forces took over an area comprising more than half of the country, including its most populous cities. They are now in control over every district of the country.

Yet not so long ago, U.S. President Joe Biden assured everybody that the Taliban would not take Kabul; nor would they take control of the whole country; there would be a government of national reconciliation, as agreed with the Taliban. And so on and so forth.

One month ago, he confidently pronounced that, “The likelihood there’s going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely. We provided our Afghan partners with all the tools — let me emphasize all the tools, training, and equipment of any modern military.”

Now all these promises have been exposed as so much hot air. The U.S. troops had not even finished their planned withdrawal, when the Taliban pounced like a stalking tiger. The speed of their assault threw the already shambling government in Kabul into a panic.

According to U.S. officials, the Afghan regime, its army, and its police, were supposed to take over the running of the country as the U.S. withdrew. But the regime was nowhere to be seen. The Afghan army, trained and armed by the U.S. military and claiming 300,000 troops, melted away in the face of the simply equipped Islamists, who even by the most generous estimates comprise no more than 75,000 full-time fighters.

In the last week, there has been a sharp contrast between the valiant
phrase-mongering of the army commanders and politicians—who all vowed to fight to the bitter end—and their complete failure to put up any resistance when the time came for it. In one city after another, the same people who had been thumping their chests only days before, handed power to the Taliban and either escaped the country, or in some cases, switched sides and offered their services to the new regime.

The Afghan army swiftly descended into a state of dissolution. City after city fell as government soldiers surrendered in droves, handing their weapons over to the Taliban in exchange for cash.

As the front closed in on Kabul, the government announced that it would negotiate a peaceful transfer of power, which would guarantee the basic rights of Afghans. President Ashraf Ghani even announced that a deal had been struck to form a transitional government composed of representatives of the Taliban and the old regime.

Before any details of such a deal were announced, news arrived that Ghani had fled the country. Ashraf Ghani’s corrupt and reactionary regime collapsed like a house of cards. Ghani made one final TV broadcast to his nation, urging them to fight to the last, then promptly packed his bags and fled in a private plane to Tajikistan, where he can be sure of a comfortable exile, while his people are once more confronted with all the delights of Taliban rule.

The same pattern was seen all over the country. While the masses were being lulled into a false sense of security by official statements, agreements were being struck behind the scenes between officials of the old regime and the Taliban. Some have speculated that the U.S. imperialists also participated in such deal-making towards the end, in a face-saving exercise to secure a bloodless exit from Kabul and prevent even greater humiliation.

While the likes of Ghani and his cohorts were busy looking after themselves, swarms of Taliban fighters descended on the capital without any resistance. Now the Afghan masses, who have suffered so much at the hand of U.S. imperialism, are bracing themselves for the return of theocractic rule. The return of the Islamic fundamentalists struck terror into the hearts of the Afghan people. As the insurgent forces approached Kabul, panic erupted in the capital.

While the workers, the poor, women, and all others who stand to suffer at the hands of the Taliban were left to their own devices, the rich were busy saving themselves. Scores of members of the elite were seen fleeing the country. Others switched sides and joined the Taliban.

While the workers, the poor, women, and all others who stand to suffer at the hands of the Taliban were left to their own devices, the rich were busy saving themselves. Scores of members of the elite were seen fleeing the country. Others switched sides and joined the Taliban.

Renewed foreign intervention is a distant prospect, however. Joe Biden has made his choice and there is no going back. His political opponents will seize the opportunity to blacken his name as “the man who betrayed the Afghans.” He protested in vain that it was his predecessor, Donald Trump, who took the fateful decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan.

That will satisfy nobody. In any case, it changes nothing, since neither the Republicans nor anyone else is seriously proposing a new military intervention. True, in the course of one week, the number of U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan swelled from one thousand to three, then five thousand and then six thousand.
But the sole intention of sending troops to Kabul is not to fight the Taliban, but to facilitate the evacuation of up to 20,000 U.S. citizens and personnel trapped in Kabul. But even that has proved to be complicated. As the week has progressed, it has become clear that the U.S. isn’t going to do much at all for most of those who stand to be targeted by Taliban repression.

Thousands of Afghans descended on the U.S. consular services to secure a visa and a flight out of the country—no doubt for the vast majority the effort proved in vain. From Saturday, Kabul’s airport was flooded with desperate people trying to leave the country at the last minute before a Taliban take over.

Others tried to leave by car leading to gridlock and a complete standstill of traffic in the city. The Taliban said that it would allow people to leave Kabul, but where can they go? Where they will be safe? The idea hinted at by the U.S. administration, that the Taliban can somehow be managed via negotiation, has already proved itself to be a hopelessly naive illusion.

Amidst scenes of chaos and panic at the International Airport, thousands of desperate Afghans attempted to flee before the U.S. finished evacuating all its civilian and military personnel. At that point, their Afghan “friends” and “allies” would be left to their fate in an act of cynical betrayal and cowardice.

This was precisely what was not supposed to happen. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was supposed to be an orderly affair. According to Biden, there would be no repeat of the U.S. evacuation of Saigon in 1975—that humiliating debacle that marked the end of the Vietnam War:

“The Taliban is not the south—the North Vietnamese army. They’re not—they’re not remotely comparable in terms of capability. There’s going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy in the—of the United States from Afghanistan. It is not at all comparable…”

In fact, what we are seeing is precisely an action replay of the Saigon scenario, right down to the scenes of military helicopters airlifting people out of the U.S. embassy. If anything, however, the present scenario is worse. The disarray is such that the Taliban, in the majority of cases, was marching from district to district virtually unopposed.

Only months ago, when announcing the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden promised that he would guarantee the survival of the Afghan regime, that he would prevent the re-emergence of outright Islamist rule, and that he would protect women’s rights. He would achieve this, somehow, while troops were removed to a safe distance. But it quickly became clear that the U.S. could barely guarantee the safety of its own personnel, let alone the safety of the Afghan people.

Even many of those who had the financial means to secure tickets abroad by air could not board their planes. The U.S. military had shut down Kabul airport to make way for its own flights. Of course, this was the fate of the few well-to-do and middle-class people. Most Afghans cannot even afford a taxi ride to the airport. For them, there is little to do now, but to wait and prepare to endure new, more excruciating levels of hardship.

Eventually, the huge crowds that gathered at the airport since the Taliban took control of the capital, took over the runways in desperate attempts to escape the country. They knew now that their lives were at risk merely for being seen to return home from the airport. But rather than welcoming them, U.S. forces reportedly fired into the air to disperse the crowds of people trying to force their way onto the planes. On Monday two men were killed by U.S. soldiers, while three were reported to have died after falling from the underside of a plane that they had attempted to cling to shortly after take-off. This is a measure of how U.S. imperialism views its “allies”—they are cannon fodder as long as they are useful. Then they are discarded as so much useless trash once they have outlived their usefulness.

How did the Taliban win?

The Biden administration has been quick to point the finger at the Afghan people, calling on them to “fight for themselves.” But his handling of the U.S. withdrawal greatly tilted the balance of forces in the Taliban’s favor. By naming the date for a complete U.S. withdrawal months in advance, he gave the Taliban a green light to attack, as well as all the time they needed to prepare their final offensive.

But the betrayal went far deeper than this. At the negotiations in February, the U.S. gave in to every single demand that the Taliban presented them with, without getting any concessions in return. In itself, this served to boost the morale of the Islamists, while sending a clear signal to the Afghan army that the U.S. was pulling the carpet from under its feet. A domino effect was set in motion in which Afghan commanders and politicians scrambled to make deals with the Taliban.

Then, despite several warnings from the Pentagon, Biden failed to accelerate U.S. withdrawal plans, imagining that there were months to go before the conflict reached its conclusion. This further magnified the sense of chaos and disarray—to the benefit of the jihadis. At every turn, the incompetence and unpreparedness of the U.S., and its willingness to cede to any Taliban demand, accelerated the rapid disintegration of the Afghan army and the state apparatus.

The Afghan state was always a mere puppet of U.S. imperialism. It was a tool of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, which has cost hundreds-of-thousands of lives and caused
immeasurable misery and suffering for the masses. It was therefore an utterly hated repressive apparatus. It was composed of the most reactionary opportunists who would willingly sell their country for the right price—a coalition of former expat technocrats, local warlords and chiefs for whom the regime and the state were little more than a means of self-enrichment. Under its rule, the people—most of whom live in deep poverty—were unable to access even the most basic public services without a bribe.

The Afghan army, officially composed of 300,000 troops, was full of “ghost soldiers;” that is, soldiers who only exist on paper as a means to funnel money into the pockets of commanders and local elites. In the end, its real function was never more than as a cloak for American imperialism. Where it did manage to operate, it was far more often seen as an occupying force than as a national army. It is no wonder that such a rotten edifice, once abandoned by U.S. imperialism, would collapse with a single kick.

The Afghan masses hate the Taliban. But on the other hand, no one believes in the corrupt regime imposed by the U.S., and certainly no one is willing to risk their lives to save it. By contrast, the Taliban forces are composed of hardened and fanatical Islamic fundamentalists for whom dying a martyr’s death is the highest prize.

This reactionary movement has been supported and nurtured over decades by the Pakistani ruling class, which has historically wished to dominate Afghanistan. Recently, however, it has also enjoyed increasing support from Iran, China, and Russia, all of whom are wary of the rising instability implicit in the retreat of U.S. power.

This has helped the Taliban gain further momentum. These powers aim to somehow tame the Islamists by offering them economic and political incentives to constrain their activities within Afghanistan’s borders. But this will not necessarily turn out to be a simple feat. The Taliban is not a centralized movement; nor is it driven by rational men who can be easily controlled. U.S. imperialism has had several first-hand experiences to convince them of this fact.

Who can be trusted?
The cynicism of western imperialism stands exposed for the whole world to see. The same people who day in, day out talk about so-called “western values” such as “democracy” and “human rights,” are now pulling out of Afghanistan and leaving their local helpers at the mercy of a gang of backward barbarians. The UK defense secretary has expressed sadness that “some people will not get back” as Britain tries to evacuate its own citizens and some of those Afghans who collaborated with its forces. As long as “helping people” meant bombing and invading a poor nation, no resources were spared. But a line is drawn when “helping people” means securing people’s lives by assisting them to flee a murderous regime.

U.S. imperialism, and the NATO forces supporting them, invaded Afghanistan claiming to want to root out Islamic fundamentalism, and build a modern, democratic nation. Twenty years later, after trillions-of-dollars have been spent, hundreds-of-thousands of lives have been lost, and a whole generation has been devastated, Afghanistan stands not one inch closer to these promises. After having ravaged the country for 20 years, these cowards are now finally fleeing like dogs with their tails between their legs, leaving the Afghan people at the mercy of the Taliban madmen. For this, they deserve to be eternally cursed by the working masses everywhere.

The Afghan masses cannot depend on any of these powers. Neither can they depend on the ruling classes of China, Russia, Iran, or any other power that lurks in the shadows trying to influence the situation in the country today. They can only depend on their own forces, which once mobilized, are far greater than any army. This has been proven throughout their history.

The Afghan people have lived through the hardest times, but time and again they have risen on the back of the most terrible adversity. We have every confidence that they will rise once more and cleanse their country of every shade of obscurantism, reaction, and imperialism.

—in Defence of Marxism, August 16, 2021

Mobilizations by Women’s Rights Supporters Needed

By Linda Loew

Abortion rights activists here and across the nation are headed to a showdown with anti-abortion forces because of the U.S. Supreme Court decision to hear arguments in the Mississippi case Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization. On the high court’s docket since May 17, oral arguments could take place as soon as this fall.

This battle intensified on July 22, when the state of Mississippi explicitly urged the Supreme Court to overturn the historic 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion across the U.S.

A filing by Mississippi Attorney General Lynn Fitch has now made reversing Roe a central part of its argument in seeking to revive its own restrictive 2018 law, banning abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. Lower courts have blocked that law as unconstitutional. Fitch’s filing declared that both the 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling and the 1992 Planned Parenthood of Southeast Pennsylvania v. Casey decision, which affirmed Roe, were “egregiously wrong.”

While earlier arguments in defense of the Mississippi law sought to weaken or chip away at Roe, this new brief and others are boldly aimed at eliminating Roe and ending legal abortion.

“Pro-life” hypocrisy

Fitch now argues that gains made by women since 1973 mean that the high court no longer needs to assure the rights of women today. Her brief states:

“[I]n 1973, there was little support for women who wanted a full family life and a successful career. Maternity leave was rare. Paternity leave was unheard of…in these last 50 years women have carved their own way to achieving a better balance for success in their professional and personal lives….By returning the matter of abortion policy to state legislatures, we allow a stunted debate on how we support women to flourish. It is time for the Court to let go of its hold on this important debate.”

Women’s rights organizations strongly disagree. Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights, which is representing Jackson Women’s Health Organization (JWHO) in the Dobbs case, finds the Mississippi brief shocking.

“Mississippi has stunningly asked the Supreme Court to overturn Roe and every other abortion rights decision in the last five decades,” Northup said. “Today’s brief reveals the extreme and regressive strategy, not just of this law, but of the avalanche of abortion bans and restrictions that are being passed across the country…Their goal is for the Supreme Court to take away our right to control our own bodies and our own futures—not just in Mississippi, but everywhere.”

On the heels of Mississippi’s filing, governors from 12 states, led by South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster, filed an amicus brief on July 29 also urging the Supreme Court to seize the opportunity of the Mississippi case to overturn Roe.

The so-called “Fight for Life” coalition of governors is “urging the Supreme Court to reconsider and correct its previous decisions in Roe v. Wade and Planned Parenthood of Southeast Pennsylvania v. Casey.” This coalition sees as its mission “to protect the lives of unborn children and defend the authority of states to regulate abortions,” McMaster said. “Today’s action is another step closer to overturning Roe v. Wade and securing the precious gift of life for an untold number of children.”

An all-out war on women disguised as “states’ rights”

In the guise of “states’ rights,” and even hypocritically “women’s rights,”
these anti-abortion forces have helped open the floodgates of religious and right-wing opposition to abortion across the nation. In its July report, the Guttmacher Institute declared 2021 the “worst legislative year ever for abortion rights.” States and localities have enacted more than 90 restrictions so far this year, more than any year since the 1973 Roe decision. This year has already surpassed 2011, the previous worst year on record.

Another indication of the deepening crisis is that abortion access is growing more restricted, especially where few or no clinics exist within many miles of those who need them. Abortion funds in areas where abortions remain more accessible have been logging mounting requests for aid, and trying to expand their staff and resources to meet the need.

In the Washington, DC area, groups that fund abortions for low-income patients have been experiencing an explosive surge in demand, partially a reflection of a medical crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Deepika Srivastava, president of the DC Abortion Fund, said this past spring, “We saw our call volume essentially double overnight.” The funds they gave out to clients this past April were “more than triple the amount from April 2020.”

According to an emailed report, the Chicago Abortion Fund (CAF) has also received a record number of calls, over 100 in just seven days this July, compared to 126 calls to its helpline for the entire month of July in 2020. Fortunately, due to popular support for its work, CAF was able to fund all requests that week.

The anti-abortion forces will go to any length to drive home their message, including hypocritically citing opinions of the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was the staunchest and most active defender of women’s rights on the Court.

“Ginsburg, who died last September, is invoked repeatedly in many of the 70 friend-of-the-court briefs urging the Supreme Court to use a Mississippi case this fall to overturn the nearly 50-year-old precedent that established a woman’s constitutional right to an abortion,” an August 8 Washington Post article reported. “Ginsburg’s disagreement with the legal reasoning in Roe is well known,” the Post continued, explaining she advocated “a woman’s right to the procedure while criticizing the decision that guaranteed it. Ginsburg said the right for a woman to end a pregnancy should be found in the Constitution’s promise of equal protection, not a privacy interest the Roe majority asserted.”

“No Abortion Bans, not now, not ever! Defend Roe!”

Opponents of abortion rights turn Ginsburg’s views on their head. No serious person believes Ginsburg would have lent any support to Mississippi’s restrictive law. She reiterated many times that the right to control our bodies should be the central axis of defense of abortion rights.

“It is essential to woman’s equality with man that she be the decision-maker, that her choice be controlling,” Ginsburg told the Senate Judiciary Committee during her confirmation hearings. “If you impose restraints that impede her choice, you are disadvantaging her because of her sex.” Ginsburg also said that overturning Roe would be a “worst-case scenario” for women.

Opponents of women’s rights are pressing for an all-out war against women’s right to control our own bodies. As these assaults on abortion rights have intensified, life and death issues are at stake.

Lower courts have ruled most abortion bans and restrictions enacted by cities or states to be unconstitutional, as violations of the Roe and Casey decisions, and have blocked them from taking effect.1

Northup of the Center for Reproductive Rights network have decided to act. Abortion rights supporters are also looking to mobilize our own power in independent action. Believing that masses of people in the streets have had an impact on Supreme Court decisions in the past, including winning Roe in the first place, activists in the Chicago for Abortion Rights network have decided to act.

Abortion rights supporters are planning a downtown press conference continued on page 65.
Why I Signed the Petition for My Own Recall

By Kshama Sawant

In response to last year’s historic Black Lives Matter uprising, with 20 million taking to the streets, the ruling class and right wing responded with 81 bills criminalizing peaceful protest in front of 34 state legislatures and over 250 voter suppression laws in 43 states, both offensives initiated by the Republicans but with no effective resistance from the Democrats. Now, both voter suppression and the attack on the right to protest have arrived squarely in liberal Seattle in the form of the right-wing Recall campaign against my socialist council office.

The Recall campaign is using massive voter suppression via a low-turnout winter special election, and the unelected state supreme court’s stamp of approval on the ballot itself, in an attempt to construct the most undemocratic election possible.

If the Recall succeeds, it will set a new and deeply dangerous precedent: when the ruling class fails to unseat left elected representatives through “normal” means like flooding races with corporate cash, or neutralize them through cooperation, they can resort to extraordinary measures like this recall. We see the same phenomenon at play in Buffalo, New York, where the City Council equivalent is threatening to abolish the position of mayor just one month after democratic socialist India Walton won the Democratic mayoral primary.

We have to fight back against both of these related attacks with the full strength of our movement.

Why big business and the right want me out

Since I was first elected to city council as an open socialist and Marxist in 2013, we have used our seat as a tool for Seattle’s working class in its fight against big business, racism, and the political establishment. In just eight years, our office has helped lead movements that won the first $15 minimum wage in a major U.S. city, the $250 million/year Amazon Tax to fund affordable housing and a Green New Deal, many crucial and first-in-the-country renters’ rights victories, the nation’s first ban on chemical weapons by the police (before the Democrats rolled back many of the strongest provisions), and more.

It is precisely because our socialist council office has been so effective at winning victories for ordinary people, and because the ruling class simply cannot beat us in normal democratic elections, that we are now facing a right-wing recall effort based around trumped-up charges against my role in the Black Lives Matter and Tax Amazon movements.

Over 130 Trump donors have donated to the Recall campaign, alongside over 500 Republican donors, more than 100 CEOs and corporate executives (locally and nationally,) and three-out-of-five billionaire dynasties in the state of Washington. Who is the Recall’s top lawyer? John McKay, former U.S. Attorney appointed by George W. Bush.

This anti–Black Lives Matter, anti-socialist campaign represents a teaming up of big business, the right wing, and the Democratic establishment against our movement. While local progressive Democrats like U.S. representative Pramila Jayapal and others on the city council have not come out explicitly in favor of the Recall, their nearly year-long silence since the Recall effort began unfortunately speaks volumes. It’s time for them to pick a side.

Voter suppression in liberal Seattle

I won election in 2013, reelection in 2015, and yet again in 2019. Besides the socialist movement beating big business and the political establishment against all odds, what did all of these elections have in common? They were all in November, and had extremely high turnouts in neighborhoods with the highest concentration of people of color, young people, and renters.

The same forces we’ve defeated three times in general elections have finally learned that lying about my record and attacking my character as “too aggressive” and unable to “work well with others” (other establishment politicians, that is) just isn’t enough. The Recall campaign has done the calculations and figured out that their only path to victory lies through suppressing voter turnout among these exact demographics.

Both historically and today, voter suppression laws are never called “The Voter Suppression Act.” None of them say “Black people can’t vote” or “poor people can’t vote.” But they suppress the vote nonetheless, and disenfranchise the most oppressed voters in a variety of indirect ways while attempting to seem innocuous.

To get the Recall on the ballot, they need to collect just 10,700 signatures. With a month left to go before the August 3 deadline to turn in their signatures for a November general election, the Recall announced they had over 9,000
officially pre-verified signatures, and that they were aiming for November but just weren’t sure if they could get there.

Despite their pace up to that point being just under 1,000-per-week (given their expensive mail operation to the wealthy parts of the district,) we predicted they were planning to intentionally slow down signature collection and, come August 3, cynically pretend they just didn’t have enough to submit.

Why? Because in King County, where Seattle is located, as recently as 2016 and 2018, special elections have had up to 40 percent and 50 percent lower turnout than general elections.

So, our movement went on the offensive, exposing the Recall’s primary strategy for what it is: voter suppression.

The only reason the Recall campaign was even in a position to bypass the general election was because the Washington State Supreme Court inexplicably delayed ruling on our case for nearly three months after their own ruling date, which was set for early January. Had they ruled even ten days earlier, a special election may have been off the table altogether.

**Signing the petition for my own recall**

At a press conference on July 9, I became perhaps the first politician to ever sign a petition for their own recall, and the Kshama Solidarity Campaign announced it would begin collecting thousands of signatures for the Recall with the message of “put up or shut up.” We said at the press conference, “You say you want to turn in your signatures and get on the ballot in November? Then do it. The Solidarity Campaign will collect the rest.” Of course, we only collected signatures from our supporters who opposed the Recall Campaign and wanted to sign as a way to fight its voter suppression.

Our campaign caught fire. Our volunteer turnout to canvassing increased eight-fold, with 764 two-hour canvassing shifts in the three weeks between July 9 and August 1. We held a Solidarity Campaign labor rally with over 100 union members in attendance followed by a canvassing shift, and Seattle DSA organized a rally and fundraiser with *Jacobin* writer Meagan Day and former Bernie 2020 press secretary Briahna Joy Gray.

We knew this approach would be a win-win for us. Either we would force the Recall to turn in the signatures by August 3, which would mean a high-turnout November election, or we would make it clear for all to see what our opponents’ aim was the whole time: avoid a general election and intentionally suppress the vote.

We delivered our rapidly growing stack of signatures to the Recall campaign every two days via a legal courier, just as they requested in the furious emails we received from their lawyer. At 2,000 signatures, we held a press conference outside the lawyer’s office, and at 3,000, the day before the August 3 deadline, held a rally outside his office that we called “Put Up or Shut Up.”

Despite clearly having enough signatures to submit for a November election, the Recall held on to their signatures and refused to turn them in. Now, our plan is to build the strongest Get Out the Vote effort Seattle has ever seen. The only way to stop right-wing attacks like voter suppression is to build a movement to fight back — so that’s exactly what we plan to do.

**Elections and the socialist movement**

We have used our Marxist city council seat to win historic victories for working people, which is why the Right, big business, and the Democratic establishment are coming after us. Because the ruling class doesn’t care how many times we have won democratic elections (despite Amazon spending $1.5 million in the 2019 city elections,) they want us out, and are now using voter suppression to try to make it happen.

As Marxists, we use the capitalist electoral system to win concrete victories for the working class, popularize and build the socialist movement, and expose in real-time the limits of the fundamentally undemocratic electoral system we are using. Ultimately, we know we can’t win a socialist transformation of society through the capitalist electoral system because it’s not our system; in fact, it’s designed specifically to prevent systemic change.

When our movement becomes too much of a threat to the status quo, the ruling class has no qualms about taking extraordinary measures, as we see with this undemocratic Recall and many more severe examples throughout history. This was what gave rise to McCarthyism and the “red scare” after World War II. Today, as the socialist movement grows more powerful and becomes better organized, the danger of a twenty-first century McCarthyism will increasingly be posed. This Recall campaign should be a warning to our entire movement.

Big business and the right wing want to make an example out of us, to show that Marxist politics will not be tolerated. But we cannot let them. Throughout the month of August, we are doing a donations drive to cancel out the Recall’s Trump and CEO dark money. Our movement must defend itself with everything we’ve got. We hope progressives and socialists across the country will join us.

—*Jacobin*, August 4, 2021


Send donations to:

[www.kshamasolidarity.org/donate](http://www.kshamasolidarity.org/donate)

Make checks payable to:

Kshama Solidarity Campaign

P.O. Box 20611

Seattle, WA 98102
Medicare For All!
The left’s curious silence about the Medicare For All demonstrations July 24, 2021
By Shamus Cooke

Note: This article has been slightly edited since it was written before the July 24 demonstrations took place.
—Socialist Viewpoint

On July 24th there was a long overdue national mobilization for Medicare For All, with a big event in Washington D.C., while 40-plus other cities across the nation had marches and/or rallies by local coalitions of progressive groups.

Such an event would normally be enthusiastically supported by all sections of the left. Interestingly, however, the lead-up to the mobilization has exposed deep divides, proving that universal healthcare isn’t actually a point of unity—but one of real controversy among leftists.

Some of the biggest names on the left have been noticeably absent in their promotion—or even mention—of the demonstrations, while some of the biggest politicians and organizations linked to the Medicare For All movement have seemingly united to shun the national day of action.

A roaring silence
Medicare For All is suddenly controversial only because the Democrats have abandoned the cause, and because they control the government, they were the de-facto targets of the July 24th demonstrations. This fact is not lost on any of the politicians who formally championed Medicare For All, since no politician wants to be in the crosshairs of a powerful demand.

Democrat animosity towards the march quickly trickled down to the left-leaning groups inside the Democrat’s big tent, whose passion for Medicare For All has been handcuffed. Some leaders of these groups are certainly aware that their silence is a condition for them to have continued “influence” among the Democrats.

Thus, organizations that talked endlessly about Medicare For All—such as Jacobin, The Democratic Socialists of America and Healthcare Now!—suddenly have nothing to say about a national march demanding it.

Equally quiet are nearly all of the 100-plus Democratic politicians who’ve co-sponsored the Congressional Medicare For All bill, who’ve been gift-wrapped a platform to promote their legislation but have declined to speak at the event or even Tweet about its existence.

The Democratic Party is exerting its influence on left-adjacent groups, proving once again that the Democrats are the graveyard of social movements.

Many left-leaning groups celebrated Medicare For All bill, who’ve been gift-wrapped a platform to promote their legislation but have declined to speak at the event or even Tweet about its existence.

The ineffectual legislation, however, is very effective at keeping left-leaning groups attached to the Democratic Party—the carrot of Medicare For All is perpetually dangled but always out of reach.

For those good faith organizers who’d like to use the bill’s existence for an opportunity to organize around Medicare For All, the obvious first step would be participating in actions like July 24th to pressure politicians to take action.

Real pressure can actually be applied because Medicare For All was already wildly popular pre-pandemic, but is certainly now the most popular solution to the current healthcare crisis.

The pandemic exposed deep rot in the U.S. healthcare system while pounding the final nail in moribund Obamacare, pushing politicians to take some action to mitigate the disaster.

When such a historic opportunity presents itself for an already-popular demand, you don’t abandon the issue instead seek breadcrumbs. But this is exactly what’s happening. The Democratic Party is exerting its influence on left-adjacent groups, proving once again that the Democrats are the graveyard of social movements.

Leftists gatekeepers
The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) expressed perhaps the loudest silence about July 24th. It’s true that a couple of local DSA chapters have decided to join the mobilizations—like Seattle, Portland, and Chicago—but national DSA has been totally silent: the DSA website and social media accounts have much to say about Medicare For All but had nothing to say about the national day of action.

The inaction poses a serious question for DSA: will it become simply a lobby group attached to the Democratic
The money to a community healthcare clinic, since $10,000 for a nationwide campaign guarantees that no real campaign will manifest. Within DSA Medicare For All is very likely the most popular issue among the membership.

Equally bad is the group Healthcare Now!—which is singularly focused on winning Medicare For All. Astonishingly, the podcast for Healthcare Now! released an episode on June 28th titled “Do Marches and Rallies Work,” without mentioning the then, upcoming march, while much of the episode was dedicated to downplaying the effectiveness of marches and rallies. Then on July 12th a new episode was released, promoting a “week of action” to “lower the age of Medicare” by “calling your Senator”—again with zero mention of July 24th.

Finally, there is the small yet powerful coterie of leftist writers, podcasters and Youtubers who have mostly shunned the event. Barely a Tweet had been donated to the cause of July 24th. The online left—much of whom share DSA-style politics—seem allergic to the streets.

Typically, organizers use every opportunity to educate and organize around the issue they’re fighting for. When a Medicare For All organizer is handed a national day of action—around the exact issue they claim to be fighting for—then why not exploit the opportunity, even if it’s done passively?

DSA or Healthcare Now! wasn’t obligated to dump all of their meager resources into July 24th, but to pretend it isn’t even happening is brazenly incompetent, at best.

Medicare For All vs. The Democrats

Few Democrats talk about Medicare For All anymore, unless it’s done purely in the abstract or in the limited context of an upcoming election. After losing his electoral campaign Bernie Sanders downgraded his advocacy from Medicare For All to “lowering the age of Medicare to 60,” and many leftish groups proceeded to copy the demand—relegating Medicare For All to sometime in the distant future.

But just as left groups started dancing to the new tune, Democrats appear to have abandoned it: the July 14th announcement about an inter-Democratic Party deal about “human infrastructure” failed to mention lowering the Medicare age, though expanding services within the existing Medicare plans was mentioned.

The “historic” deal will of course be whittled down in the Senate before passage, where the age of Medicare will stay at 65 as “progressives” will praise the bill as “a step in the right direction” toward Medicare For All.

This historical moment was made for Medicare For All, and missing the moment is never “a step in the right direction,” but an opportunity for the healthcare oligarchy to survive a historic crisis intact.

Many liberal/labor groups also falsely claimed that the Affordable Care Act was a “step in the right direction,” while in practice it bought the healthcare oligarchy ten years of historic, stable profits that continued jacking up the cost of healthcare.

If groups pursuing Medicare For All can be perpetually distracted by crumbs every time a crisis emerges, they’ll never reach their goal, nor will their members have any faith in their strategy or dedication to the cause.

Organizing reaches its apogee when the iron is struck while hot. Jacobin magazine once understood this: In 2017 they published an article “We Need a Medicare For All March on Washington.” But now that we actually had one Jacobin is nowhere to be seen. In their article the writer argues:

“Simply, a [Medicare For All] march would give socialists the opportunity to vocally and aggressively lead on a major working-class demand. It would help us build organization, forge political consensus, and reintegrate the socialist movement with a key sector of the workers’ movement...The achievability and immediacy of a march gives us the opportunity to focus attention on a single nationwide goal and will help us foster solidarity among thousands of socialists and progressive workers...The socialist left cannot afford to let this moment pass.”

The moment is riper than it was in 2017, and it can be seized or squandered. All socialists, progressives, and unionists should have been promoting July 24th, while future mobilizations should still be considered to keep the fire hot.

—CounterPunch, July 16, 2021

http://www.counterpunch.org/2021/07/16/the-lefts-curious-silence-about-the-medicare-for-all-demonstrations/
The brilliant writer was also a dear friend and mentor.

Glen was a man whose voice thundered with the passion of justice, his keen eyes intensified by those round glasses that sat on the bridge of his strong nose right in front of his daunting intelligence, his word mastery and their unveiling of perceptions he gleaned from having been wounded by a culture bent against his people, against him personally, as when it deployed hitmen against his life's work. It was a confirmation that he was on the right track when he and the Black Agenda Report family made the government’s blacklist of subversive publications. So, there was anger. And clarity. And passion that combined to make Glen more than a little intimidating. There was his work ethic. His unrelenting discipline. His body of work. His insistence on excellence. His wry sense of humor—that would catch one off guard—and his deep and unconditional love for Black people.

I learned about Glen before I met him. I was at a low point in my life. As a senior advisor at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), I had blown the whistle on U.S. complicity in the deaths of South African vanadium mine workers. And the U.S. was retaliating. I was receiving death threats; there were attacks on my family and job; my daughter was nearly kidnapped. Isolated and depressed, I was looking for relief. And that’s when Black Agenda Report came into my life. Reading Glen Ford, Bruce Dixon, and Margaret Kimberley was like long draws of oxygen. I savored their new contributions every Wednesday. Then I finally found the courage to write to Glen—and shared what I was going through. He wrote back immediately and invited me to meet him during his next visit to Washington, DC.

So, when I met Glen, all of these—his reputation, his voice, his intensity—coupled with my own insecurities huddled around us during our eyes’ first contact. There was an awkwardness both my own and his that felt aloof in a way that surprised me: we shared the same passions. We fought the same demons. We sought the same solutions. And we bridged that initial awkwardness by sharing stories about our experiences in the Black Panther Party. He shared that Bruce Dixon, a stalwart of Black Agenda Report, was also in the Panthers. Glen was a member in Jersey City, Bruce in Chicago, and me in Detroit. I realized from the first moment that we had all drunk from the deep love that the Black Panther Party nourished. It fed Glen’s commitment and devotion to speaking—oftentimes painful—truth to power in the Black Agenda Report. Glen refocused my energies from what seemed an inevitable downward spiral towards pouring my anger and indignation into writing. After I wrote my book, No FEAR, Glen published most of the chapters in Black Agenda Report.

Glen Ford was a revolutionary. His unique contribution as a writer advocate, as a mentor—was to lay the material foundation and provide the seeds for following generations to understand the complexity of white supremacy capitalism. His goal was to arm our community with the information necessary to fight against the most depraved, perverted, and wicked system that has ever been created. Amilcar Cabral knew “that people do not fight for ideas in the sky but for concrete ways to change their material conditions.” Glen understood that through his writings he would inspire political activism and turn what most people would consider the “unthinkable” into the “inevitable.”
While other Black news outlets were experiencing a sugar high with the election of the first Black president, it took integrity and courage to take on the presidency of Barack Obama. The Black Agenda Report family told our community the truth. Glen rooted his analysis in the material conditions and restrictions facing our people under white supremacy capitalism. With Glen’s tutelage BAR exposed the crimes being committed by the Obama administration. And we took the inevitable criticism. Glen’s fundamental principle in Black Agenda Report was to tell the truth regardless of the consequences.

Malcolm, expressed goals that Glen lived to actualize:

“We declare our right on this earth to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary."

During the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, Glen, Bruce, Nellie Ballie, and I, it dawned on us that the U.S. war against the Black Panther Party was fundamentally a war against teenagers and young adults. The government waged war against a generation determined to taste freedom. It was exactly this wounding and abuse by the U.S. government—both as a teenager and a veteran—that informed Glen’s character and nobility.

Glen showed me Arundhati Roy’s:

“Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe.”

Glen’s goal was to break the spine of white supremacy capitalism. He denied it oxygen, shamed it, mocked it—with his sheer brilliance, mentoring and encouraging anyone who could put two sentences together to use their talents to tell the stories of the depravity of capitalism and its agents—both black and white.

When last I spoke with Glen it was after he published my umpteenth article on the desecration of Moses Macedonia African Cemetery in Bethesda. Glen called me to discuss the article and interview me for the Black Agenda Report Radio. Other media have given the story occasional coverage, but Glen understood that the erasure, the annihilation, the casting of Black souls into oblivion is not a story to be given short shrift but is one that demands our undivided attention. He understood the stakes. The garish profits. The ghoulish dismissal of Black relevance. The implications for reparations. If it wasn’t a huge deal, he understood, they would not be fighting you so hard and so ugly.

I could not have imagined that would be our last conversation.

Glen’s spirit reminds us of the passion of Fred Hampton, of Bruce Dixon’s embrace, Malcolm’s courage, Amilcar Cabral’s brilliance. Black Agenda Report, in the purest sense is a continuation of the liberation struggle that had started in the streets and hearts of young revolutionaries across the country under the auspices of the Black Panther Party. Glen had picked up the mantle of Black liberation and carried it until the day he passed into eternal power. How can we, who claim to admire and love Glen, fail to now pick up that mantle and pass it on to the next generation? I did not know when I made my first tentative approach to this powerful, shy, brilliant unassuming man, that I loved him from the moment I met him.

Dr. Marsha Adebayo is the author of: No FEAR: A Whistleblower’s Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA. She blew the whistle on a U.S. multinational corporation that endangered South African vanadium mine workers. Marsha’s successful lawsuit led to the passage of the first civil rights and whistleblower law of the 21st century: the Notification of Federal Employees Antidiscrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No FEAR Act) Currently, she is working to stop desecration of an African burial ground in Bethesda, Maryland.

—Black Agenda Report, August 4, 2021

Socialist Viewpoint readers will note that this magazine has reprinted many articles by Glen Ford from Black Agenda Report. We will miss his socialist analysis of U.S. politics, white supremacy, capitalism, and its unending war drive. Glen Ford: ¡Presente! Ford’s death is a big loss!
The failure of the guardians of public health during the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. is a catastrophe. Physicians and public health workers have a duty to protect the health of the people. Why is there silence from the medical community as politicians of every stripe remove protective public health measures, leaving us all “free” to be infected, as COVID-19 spreads across the nation, leaving sickness, disability and death in its wake. A deliberate policy, rationalized by a non-scientific, dark ages, “herd immunity” fiction. In the UK, scientists and doctors are not afraid to shout out publicly, that ending all COVID-19 restrictions is “dangerous and premature.”

Which U.S. physicians and public health organizations have taken a public stand to protect the people? Have medical schools, state medical boards, the American Medical Association, and the American Public Health Association taken a public stand to condemn the government’s abandoning all public health measures? Have they issued statements, made press releases, held demonstrations, or job actions? The silence is deafening!

Who will stand up for the people’s health?

Vaccines alone, without public health measures, cannot effectively contain or eliminate COVID-19. The science of public health can rapidly reduce transmission and spread of the virus, through social distance, masking, testing, tracing, and isolation.

Who will fight against the 24 states that are actively trying to draft laws to dismantle or weaken the powers of public health?

Who is organizing to immediately replace the more than 180 state and local public health officials in 38 states who have resigned, retired, or been fired?

Who will struggle to demand the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), keep workers safe on the job with compulsory and enforceable regulations?

Who will demand an immediate reversal of the cuts to OSHA inspectors, now at the lowest number since 1975?

Who will speak out, and take action to confront the destruction of public health, the rejection of science, and the resulting risk of disease and death for millions?

The population has been abandoned by the guardians of public health.

We the people, the vast majority, the working people, are on our own. We must rely on ourselves to insist that the government protect us.

Trillions of dollars have gone to Wall Street and the military, while pennies go to protecting our health. The health of millions depends upon our organizing independently to demand our social needs be met.

1 https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n1751
August 7, 2021—At the end of January this year, mainstream pro-capitalist politicians probably felt a sigh of relief. Donald Trump had been evicted from the White House and a vaccine to combat the coronavirus had been developed—indeed three of them together. Normal service for world capitalism could be resumed. Alas, it was not to be. Despite high levels of vaccination in a few rich countries, vaccine nationalism and the fast-spreading Delta variant have combined to ensure a rapid increase in the levels of infection. At the same time extreme weather events have sounded an ominous warning note. Scientists are warning that super high temperatures and disastrous weather events are going to be the new normal. Why?

Let’s start with the high-pressure heat “dome” that has caused disaster for farming and rural communities in Oregon, and as far north as Vancouver in Canada. The immediate cause of this is high sea temperatures causing storms off Japan in the North Pacific. These have combined to create a “Rossby wave” of high temperatures stretching hundreds of miles into the atmosphere and dragged eastwards by the Jet Stream, ending up as the heat dome over the North West U.S. coast and part of Canada. But the root cause is high sea temperatures.

The U.S.-Canada heat dome is worsened by ground level factors, namely long-term drought conditions and tinder-dry woodland and grassland. The U.S. West is facing a systemic water crisis as the giant aquifer under the Rockies dries out and Lake Mead, created in Boulder Canyon by the Hoover Dam, sinks to record lows. If this decline continues, water supplies to Arizona and Nevada are under immediate threat. In the longer-term California also faces a water crisis.

Massively high temperatures are hitting the eastern Mediterranean and causing catastrophic fires in Turkey’s star tourist resorts like Bodrum and Antalya. Right-wing Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was quick to blame the Kurdish rebels of the PKK for starting the fires, an absurdity given the geographical scope of the inferno. The Turkish fires are part of the East Mediterranean high temperature process affecting Greece and Italy as well as Turkey, and extending northwards into Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Wildfires have threatened the outskirts of Catania, second city of Sicily, and the northern suburbs of Athens, and stretched into Bosnia and Croatia.

Obviously, the tourist industry in many of these countries, already battered by the pandemic, is now facing major losses. The southern coastal resorts of Turkey, center of a hugely profitable industry, have always been known for high temperatures—the message has been only to go on holiday there if you can cope with regular temperatures of 35°C/95°F. But now it’s more around 40°C/95°F, impossible temperatures for many tourists. The same is true for many parts of the Mediterranean, as far West as Portugal. This time around, Sardinia, far to the West, has also been badly affected by wildfires.

But inland in many countries of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and especially in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and southern Iran, the heat and water crisis are causing massive hardship for ordinary people. Little covered in the mainstream media, there has been a revolt among the ethnically Arab people in Khuzestan, the southern Iranian

Markleeville, California USA - July 17, 2021: The Tamarack Fire burns on the eastern edge of California just south of Lake Tahoe. (Shutterstock)
region bordering Iraq. They accuse the Iranian government of corruption and incompetence in water management. The government has responded to protests with its usual brutality.

**Drastic effects on inhabitants**

On a much larger scale, the cities of Iraq, especially in the south, are suffering from drastic heat levels and water shortages. While the country has seen its water supply reduced because of Turkey and Syria taking more water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that supply Iraq, government corruption and infrastructure collapse mean that ordinary people are struggling to get water needed for washing and cooking. Climate change also plays a big role. As one Chatham House (the international policy institute) commentator puts it:

“Historically, Iraq lay claim to one of the most abundant water supplies in the Middle East. But the flow of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has reduced by up to 40 percent since the 1970s, due in part to the actions of neighboring countries, in particular Turkey, upstream.

“Rising temperatures and reduced rainfall due to climate change are also negatively impacting Iraq’s water reserves.”

**China, Russia, India**

While the water crisis and firestorms developed globally in July, in China massive floods inundated Zhengzhou, major city of Henan province, killing dozens on the swamped metro system. However, it is not simply a matter of wildfires in Oregon and the massive floods inundated Zhengzhou, major city of Henan province, killing dozens on the swamped metro system. However, it is not simply a matter of wildfires in Oregon and the Mediterranean while there are floods in China. The Zhengzhou floods were immediately preceded by days of temperatures in the high 30°C/80°F that created the atmospheric conditions for a huge downpour and flooding. The China Meteorological Administration blamed the storm on strong and sustained subtropical high-pressure systems that, along with Typhoon In-fa approaching South China, pushed water vapor from the sea to Henan. Global heating causing rising sea temperatures once again played a deadly role.

Business websites unsurprisingly raised the alarm that Zhengzhou is a major center for the manufacture of iPhones, as well as being a center of manufacturing generally and food production. As in China, Western commentators are beginning to wonder if China’s flood and emergency rescue systems are up to the job. The emphasis is on managing the disasters caused by climate change, not on taking decisive action to reduce its impact and extent. “Learn to live with it” is becoming the right-wing mantra for climate change and COVID-19.

If all this were not enough, huge wildfires in the Yakutsk region of Siberia have created the worst pollution crisis ever in a major city, with chemicals like ozone, benzene and hydrogen cyanide being released. The exact source of this poisonous mixture is not known. What is clear is that this area has the reputation of being one of the coldest in the world and is now involved in its own heating crisis, making the area doubly unlivable.

And finally, there is the flooding in India from an exceptionally intense monsoon season, and the sudden dramatic storms in Germany that have washed away small towns and killed more than 150 people.

What does all this mean for the world’s climate? This is summed up by veteran environmental campaigner Fred Pearce:

“Some of the most alarming science surrounding climate change is the discovery that it may not happen incrementally—as a steadily rising line on a graph—but in a series of lurches as various ‘tipping points’ are passed. And now comes a new concern: These tipping points can form a cascade, with each one triggering others, creating an irreversible shift to a hotter world. A new study suggests that changes to ocean circulation could be the driver of such a cascade. The potential tipping points come in three forms: runaway loss of ice sheets that accelerate sea level rise; forests and other natural carbon stores such as permafrost releasing those stores into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO2), accelerating warming; and the disabling of the ocean circulation system.”

Briefly summed up, potential tipping points that were once considered independent of one another are now seen as part of a world system. Global heating, melting ice sheets and glaciers, and rising temperatures on land and sea could be pushing a catastrophic rise in sea levels and an average temperature rise of 3°C/37°F, way in excess of the Paris target of 1.5°C/34°F, leading to a global catastrophe.

Certainly, large parts of the world are set for routine summer temperatures of 40°C/104°F—including Britain. A study published in the Royal Meteorological Society’s International Journal of Climatology, found that Britain’s climate is becoming hotter and wetter, and that summer temperatures are likely to reach 40°C/104°F by 2040 if present trends continue.

That of course is the key question—what will be done to combat global heating and its disastrous effects. When the flooding disaster struck Germany and Belgium in July, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, due to leave office within weeks, emotionally stated her grief and said that Germany would have to “do more.” These mealy-mouthed words are the typical response of mainstream capitalist politicians who have failed to meet even the inadequate targets set by the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015.

**Who are the victims?**

The Guardian’s acute analyst Aditya Chakrobortty predicts a change of tack among right wing politicians. Climate change denial is out, and the new line
will be that climate change is inevitable and we will “just have to live with it.” Just like we are being told we will just have to live with the COVID-19 pandemic. “We” is in this context a slippery term. In the near and medium future those sections of the world’s populations who have abundant water supplies, secure food, working electricity and air conditioning, and the resources to move where they live, will “live with” climate change much more easily than the poor—the poor in the Global South and the poor also in the advanced countries, much more likely to be the victims of fire and flood.

In his excellent new book Fight the Fire, Jonathan Neale outlined a plan to cut CO2 emissions by 90 percent and other harmful emissions by 50-75 percent, through a conversion of heating and other domestic energy, transport, and industry to sustainable electricity sources, especially through wind and solar power. This involves substantial changes to the energy grid, says Neale. What stands in the way of this plan? The answer is basically fossil fuel capitalism, whose companies make up a significant percentage of international stock markets. This of course involves both oil and coal, and the countries that have vast reserves of these resources, like Australia, China, India, and Saudi Arabia. But it’s more than that. It’s also the structure of production that is skewed towards wasteful, unnecessary, and especially luxury, goods. The transformation away from fossil fuel capitalism means a major social and political transformation.

The big issues of climate change will be debated at the November Conference of the Parties (COP) environment conference in Glasgow. But whatever is agreed there, humanity for the moment can only be in the process of mitigating climate change, not stopping it. Climate change is already underway. The fact that the UK is predicted to have average summer temperatures of 40°C/104°F by 2040 does not mean we will have mild temperatures until then. On the contrary, the recent report by the independent Climate Change Committee warns of rising temperatures and more storms and floods in the short and medium term. The results of this report are summed up on the UK Greenpeace site.

The disastrous fires in the Mediterranean, Siberia and North America this year are not something just affecting Other People. Britain and Northern Europe are integrated into world weather systems and will suffer the results of global heating too. Without major political change on the climate, the future is grim.

Phil Hearse writes for the Socialist Resistance and Mutiny websites, is co-author of Creeping Fascism (2019).

—International Viewpoint, August 7, 2021

https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7255

Stop Line 3 Tar Sands Pipeline

BY BRETT WILKINS

As state and local law enforcement in Minnesota intensify their violent repression of water protectors resisting Enbridge’s Line 3 tar sands pipeline, Indigenous leaders on Thursday, August 5, 2021, appealed for allies in their effort to pressure the U.S. government to honor Native American treaty rights and protect the environment and climate by stopping the toxic project.

At least 20 Indigenous-led water protectors were brutally arrested in northern Minnesota last weekend, with law enforcement using tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets, and pepper projectiles in an attempt to break resistance to the Canadian pipeline company’s $9 billion Line 3 project.

Native American leaders pointed to recent events, including the violent repression of Stop Line 3 water protectors and the discovery of the remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children at Indian boarding schools in Canada and the United States, as evidence of an ongoing “slow genocide.”

“This is no accident,” said Chase Iron Eyes, co-director and lead counsel for the Lakota People’s Law Project, in a statement Thursday. “The drilling that Enbridge is being allowed to do here is a continuation of the same pattern of subjugation and genocide faced by Indigenous populations throughout history.”

Iron Eyes continued:

“Our treaties have been ignored, our children have been killed, and now our rivers are being poisoned. And when we stand up to the forces of extractive greed, we pay a heavy price. We are asking President Biden to stop Line 3, and we need everyone who can to come to the frontlines in support. We need those who can’t come here in person to amplify this message through every available channel.”

“We are running out of time to do the right thing for future generations,” said Iron Eyes.

If built as planned, Line 3 will carry up to 760,000 barrels-per-day of crude tar sands oil—the world’s dirtiest fuel—from Alberta to the port of Superior, Wisconsin, crossing Anishinaabe treaty land without consent. The conduit’s route is set to traverse more than 200 bodies of water and 800 wetlands, raising serious concerns not only about its climate impact, but also about accidents and leaks that plague pipelines.
“Eight hundred wetlands, that’s what’s at stake here,” Indigenous lawyer and Giniw Collective co-founder Tara Houska said Thursday. “Beautiful, untouched ecosystems, endangered by a corporation with no knowledge of or respect for this land. They have no idea what they’re doing here. President Biden has the power to stop this, but he’s not listening closely enough.”

Houska was among the water protectors who were violently arrested while protesting Line 3 last weekend.

“The level of brutality that was unleashed on us was very extreme,” Houska, who said she was shot by police with rubber-coated steel bullets before being hospitalized and jailed, told Democracy Now! Wednesday.

“People were shot in their faces, in their bodies, in their upper torsos,” she said. “I saw a young woman’s head get split open right in front of me. It was a really, really brutal scene. And the arrests in person were also quite brutal, throwing people face down in the dirt and being extremely violent.”

Houska continued:

“When I was sitting on the side of a police vehicle with several others waiting to be brought to jail, I overheard several of the police officers talking about how they were going to get bonus time for this brutality they had unleashed upon us...Police officers are reimbursed for any costs associated with Enbridge Line 3 protests, and it seems like they welcome the opportunity. One police officer was actually grinning and smiling and said he had a great time and couldn’t wait for us to come again.

“They’ve billed over $1.7 million to the Public Safety Escrow Trust, in which Enbridge is dumping millions of dollars to incentivize and encourage police officers to repress, suppress, surveil, and harass Indigenous people and our allies that are helping us try to stop this pipeline from happening in our treaty territory.”

“Our treaties have been ignored, our children have been killed, and now our rivers are being poisoned. And when we stand up to the forces of extractive greed, we pay a heavy price.”

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission required the trust to reimburse law enforcement when approving the project in 2018.

Water protectors told Democracy Now! that they were denied medical care for injuries they suffered at the hands of police. Some of the activists also said they were denied proper food and held in solitary confinement.

Among others arrested in recent weeks were Lakota People’s Law Project co-director Dan Nelson, Honor the Earth co-founder Winona LaDuke, and a journalist who goes by the camp name “River,” who says he suffered a neck injury after being placed in a chokehold by police after recording officers arresting a water protector.

Houska called for allies to join water protectors on the frontlines of the fight against Line 3, saying that “we need our brothers and sisters to stand with us.”

As part of the wider effort to stop Line 3, Honor the Earth and Indigenous Environmental Network, in partnership with over 200 artists and activists, on Thursday launched a six-figure ad buy, including full-page advertisements in the New York Times and Minneapolis Star Tribune, and a digital ad on the Washington Post website, calling on the Biden administration to stand with Anishinaabe people to stop Line 3.

The Lakota People’s Law Project said that anyone who is interested in joining the fight against Line 3 should follow the organization and the Giniw Collective on social media, contact the group about going to the frontlines, and sign a petition urging Biden to stop the pipeline project like he rescinded the federal permit for the Keystone XL pipeline on his first day of office following years of grassroots organizing.

LaDuke recently told Slate: “Biden’s acting like he canceled one pipeline so he gets a gold star. But you don’t get a gold star from Mother Earth to let Line 3 go ahead. You don’t get a gold star from the planet.”

—Common Dreams, August 5, 2021
https://www.commondreams.org/news/2021/08/05/stand-us-indigenous-line-3-opponents-seek-allies-fight-tar-sands-pipeline

Opponents of Canadian company Enbridge’s Line 3 tar sands pipeline march to the White House in Washington, D.C. on April 1, 2021 to call on President Joe Biden to cancel the toxic project’s permit.

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The Torture Machine: Racism and Police Violence in Chicago
By Flint Taylor
Haymarket Books, 2019 (hardback), 2020 (paperback), 556 pages, $19.95 paperback
https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/1642-the-torture-machine

The “city of broad shoulders” and architectural gems, Chicago, also has a dark chapter in its history: torture of African American men carried out for decades by the Chicago Police Department (CPD). Flint Taylor’s The Torture Machine: Racism and Police Violence in Chicago spans nearly 50 years in more than 500 pages.

The book delivers a harrowing account of the police torture carried out by Commander Jon Burge and the officers he supervised, between 1972 and 1991. With over 120 known victims, mostly African American males, one as young as 13-years-old, the book details several cases and the scope of denial and cover-up.

It hails the struggle to prove that it happened, to hold those guilty of torture and its cover-up accountable, and to win justice for victims. It is not easy to read, but important to know.

The opening chapter, “Murder by Night,” recounts the December 4, 1969 assassinations of Black Panther Party Chairman Fred Hampton and leader Mark Clark. Taylor, then a law student, joined the civil suit filed on behalf of the families and survivors of the murderous raid.

He and other young lawyers from the newly founded People’s Law Office (PLO) helped win an unprecedented settlement in 1982. The 13-year suit also revealed the raid to be an integral part of the FBI’s COINTELPRO program. These revelations changed the narrative on the racist nature of police practices in Chicago, setting the stage for the “torture wars” to follow.

“Torture Machine” has two intertwined meanings: one is the electric shock device used on many of the interrogated suspects. “Torture machine” also refers to the system of law enforcement and government (police superintendents, judges and elected officials all the way up to mayor) who were complicit in denying, condoning and covering up crimes. Many lied under oath or delayed justice for victims.

Torture: Vietnam to Chicago
By the time the Hampton/Clark suit was settled in 1982, another reign of terror was underway. The CPD conducted a sweeping “manhunt” through predominantly African American neighborhoods of Chicago’s south side, kidnapping and arresting suspects for the murder of two police officers. If there was no immediate evidence, they would beat and torture confessions out of their suspects.

The victims and the cops who tortured them fell on two sides of Chicago’s racial divide. In one of the most segregated cities in the nation following the Great Migration of African Americans to northern cities, these neighborhoods suffered decades of deep inequality and rampant neglect in housing, healthcare, jobs and education.

The victims from these neighborhoods were treated by the system as less than human, not to be believed by their interrogators, the courts, or the public. During one early trial seeking justice for torture victim Andrew Wilson, Judge Duff referred to Wilson as “scum of the earth.” (Pg. 122)

In contrast, working class whites made up (and still do) a disproportionate number of Chicago’s police force.

Jon Burge had served as a military police sergeant in a prisoner of war camp in South Vietnam during the height of the war. He oversaw interrogations that included murder and torture with electric shock.

Burge returned a “war hero,” and went on to head the Violent Crimes Unit at CPD Area 2, and later Area 3 on Chicago’s south side. Burge and his team were portrayed by the system as hard-working cops in high-crime neighborhoods who faced danger every day. Even as the torture was taking place, Burge was promoted from detective to commander in record time.

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In the public image, “Burge and his men gave new meaning to the ‘war on crime’ politics gripping Chicago and the nation, churning out an impressive record of arrests, confessions, and convictions that fueled the mass incarceration of young African American men.” (Pg. 67)

The acts and instruments of torture were varied and rotated at the whim of individual cops. These included suffocation with plastic bags (often type-writer covers,) known in military jargon as “dry submarino,” beatings on the bottoms of feet and on testicles, being handcuffed to the wall or window while being spread over a hot radiator, all while being interrogated.

The legendary “black box” was clipped to suspects’ hands or ears, then cranked like a telephone, sending electrical charges through the victim, causing shocks and injuries to organs, head and hands.

It bore a striking resemblance to torture techniques applied by the U.S. military in Vietnam, in Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq, and at Guantanamo.

This method was often used last to put the finishing touches on hours of torture in order to extract a confession. A State’s Attorney would wait in an adjacent room, ready to grab the signed confession.

The iceberg surfaces

The decades-long case of Andrew Wilson is a central thread through the book. Wilson endured many of the practices in the Burge torture playbook. The judge in his first trial refused to allow documents that supported Wilson’s torture claims. He was found guilty by an all-white jury and sentenced to death.

Eventually granted a new trial, the civil suit he also launched for damages, taken on by Taylor and a PLO legal team, led to investigations into the torture of many other victims.

The initial victims turned out to be the tip of the iceberg on torture carried out in CPD Areas 2 and 3. Each investigation led to others. Taylor and his team traveled to all corners of the state to take testimony.

Another compelling example is Darrell Cannon. His testimony given from prison described being taken to a remote area of Chicago’s southeast side in 1983, subjected to electric shock on his genitals and mock execution with a shotgun held in his mouth, while racial epithets were shouted at him.

The crisis of police violence is not about “bad apples.” It is an institution formed and mired in centuries of systemic racism.

Despite vivid testimony at his first trial and again in 1993 and 1994, his conviction stood. He was resentenced to life in prison, although his confession was based on torture. These rulings were eventually overturned by a Judge Wolfson in 1997, who declared that “…in a civilized society torture by police officers is an unacceptable means of obtaining confessions from suspects.” (Pg. 238)

Despite being granted a new trial, due to complications, Cannon would remain in prison until 2007. The physical, psychological, and legal nightmare endured by Darrell Cannon repeats in the lives of many others.

Several cases progressed at the same time. The names of all victims are too numerous to list here. All their suffering matters, regardless of their status of innocent or guilty of alleged crimes. Together, their experiences formed the basis for charges of a “racist pattern and practice” that was difficult to prove and resisted by the system, until the mountain of evidence was too huge to bury or deny.

A major breakthrough came in 1990 with the investigative journalism of John Conroy, writing for the weekly Chicago Reader. His article “House of Screams,” detailing the torture of Andrew Wilson, was read by a large audience and captured the attention of Amnesty International. AI eventually brought international attention to police torture in Chicago.

Global conferences and reports took up the cause. Lawyers for torture survivors as well as Chicago community leaders presented cases before the UN Committee Against Torture (UNCAT) as well as the Human Rights Committee in Geneva in 2006.

One of the reports led to the first call for reparations as a vehicle for bringing justice to torture victims. This international spotlight was huge, coinciding with growing protests in the streets of Chicago, and increased media coverage around the country.

The importance of protest

“Out of the Court and into the Streets” (Chapter 8) underscores the role of community protests, including demonstrations led by the Task Force to Prevent Police Violence and the Citywide Coalition Against Police Abuse.

By 1989, this coalition of 29 groups led a demonstration at police headquarters, declaring that cases of racist police abuse were on the rise all over the city. They delivered a petition to Mayor Richard M. Daley and Police Superintendent Martin, raising for the first time the idea of reparations from the CPD to the victims of police torture.

More marches, tribunals on campuses, protests in and outside courtrooms, all contributed pressure. There was mounting irrefutable evidence of torture that the political machine could no longer cover up. Witnesses came forward, including a few from the ranks of the police.

The torture wars had their very own “Deep Badge,” an unnamed detective sending documents that corroborated the torture that transpired in Area 2.
and Area 3 interrogations. Another detective, Frank Laverty, also busted the code of silence, coming forward about the frame-up of George Jones, an innocent young man just out of high school, who spent five painful months in Cook County Jail for a crime he did not commit.

Laverty helped reveal the existence of “secret (aka street) files” which led to Jones’ release and later exonerations of others falsely convicted. Demoted and shunned by his fellow detectives, Laverty’s fate reflects the atmosphere of fear and intimidation facing cops with a conscience.

The crisis of police violence is not about “bad apples.” It is an institution formed and mired in centuries of systemic racism. Those with a conscience often have to leave the force to preserve their humanity.

Additional key witnesses were finally allowed before juries. Among them was Dr. Jack Raba, Director of Medical Services at Cook County Jail, whose earlier requests for investigations of torture at Area 2 had been ignored. Joining him were experts in post-traumatic stress disorder. Many torture survivors continue to struggle with PTSD.

Solidarity was also important inside the prisons. A group of prisoners, previously unknown to each other, began a study group through which they discovered that each had been a victim of torture. They became the “Death Row 10.”

Aided by the Campaign to End the Death Penalty, their cause was boosted by a major Chicago Tribune article featuring one of the wrongfully convicted, Aaron Patterson. In January 2003, just hours before leaving office, Illinois Governor George Ryan declared a moratorium on the death penalty, and he commuted the death sentences of another 15 Death Row inmates to life in prison. They became the “Death Row 10.”

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In an impassioned speech, Ryan quoted U.S. Supreme Court Justice Blackmun’s 1994 assertion that “I can no longer tinker with the machinery of death.” Ryan added “The legislature couldn’t reform it; lawmakers won’t repeal it. But I will not stand for it. I must act. Our capital system is haunted by the demon of error.” (Pgs. 295-6)

Journalism professors and students at Northwestern University’s Medill Innocence Project played an important role in the lead up to this historic act by Governor Ryan.

During and since the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd, there have been an average of three racially motivated police shootings every day.

In March of 2011 Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed into law the abolition of the death penalty, and he commuted the death sentences of another 15 Death Row inmates to life in prison.

Justice delayed

While Commander Burge was suspended in 1991, and fired in 1993, his conviction did not come until 2010. After years of denials, lies, invoking of the Fifth Amendment and being aided by judges to elude justice, Burge was finally convicted of perjury and conspiracy to obstruct.

Despite a regrettable statute of limitations on conviction for torture, and a prison sentence of a mere four years, Burge’s conviction helped open doors to admission of torture evidence in several cases.

In January 2012 the Chicago City Council passed a unanimous resolution making Chicago the first U.S. city to formally oppose all forms of torture. Real justice still lagged behind this largely symbolic gesture.

While no elected official was ever held legally accountable for the crimes committed on their watch, the city itself was finally forced to reckon with and pay for the torture inflicted by Burge and his cohorts.

On May 6, 2015, the Chicago City Council unanimously passed the Reparations Ordinance, a historic and unprecedented measure, first in the nation. It was drafted by Joey Mogul, a co-lead counsel in several of the cases representing Burge torture survivors, as well as a founding leader of the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials.

The CTJM helped spearhead a multi-pronged, multi-racial, multi-generational organizing campaign to bring material justice to torture survivors.

Burge’s conviction and time served, the elimination of the death penalty, a series of exonerations, commutations, and ultimately the Reparations Ordinance are victories which also proved the fact of torture. The “black box” may have ended up at the bottom of Lake Michigan, tossed overboard from Burge’s aptly named boat, the “Vigilante,” and torture by Burge ceased, but torture did not end in Chicago.

As recently as 2020, there were regular protests to close the Homan Square detention center, a police “black site” where more than 10,000 mostly Black and Brown men were arrested and detained (“disappeared.”)

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As revealed by a series of articles in The Guardian newspaper, detainees, including political protesters, were held for hours or days, without access to lawyers, bathrooms, or water. Many suffered some of the same physical abuse as in the Burge days. Lasting for more than 15 years, legal cases continue for victims of abuse at this location.

A widening discussion

During and since the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd, there have been an average of three racially motivated police shoot-
Kevin “Rashid” Johnson’s name will be familiar to readers of Socialist Viewpoint, which has published cogent articles and artwork by him for many years. Rashid writes about prison conditions in the U.S. and has exposed atrocities carried out by prison officials—even murders of prisoners. The last issue of Socialist Viewpoint (July/August 2021) carried an article by Rashid entitled “Interstate Prison Transfers, Weapons of Political Repression,” in which he discusses his own punitive transfers from Virginia, to Oregon, to Texas, to Florida, to Indiana, all in retaliation for standing up for prisoners’ rights. But now, Ohio can be added to the list because on July 28th, Rashid was transferred again, this time to the notorious Southern Ohio Correctional Facility in Lucasville, Ohio, where, in April of 1993, nine prisoners were killed in an eleven-day standoff with prison staff.

The transfer was carried out with cruel conditions: Rashid has not received any of his property, including his legal documents (while he is in the midst of legal actions with court deadlines,) writing materials, hygiene products, clothing, “not even a pair of shoes.” And his stay in Lucasville began with restrictions on his right to communicate and to use the commissary.

Rashid has provided to his comrade and partner, Shupavu, information about his situation and what kind of help he needs:

“He wants us to focus on identifying where his property is at, if it was shipped and on what date, and also fighting this bogus 30-day restriction from phone, email, and commissary. He literally has nothing.

This means transformative change not only with police and prisons, but in healthcare, education, housing, jobs and the environment. A range of ideas are being examined and debated including calls to defund the police, abolish the police and reimagine public safety.

The fight for justice for torture victims and all victims of racism continues. Flint Taylor’s call to action in the closing pages of his book is absolutely true: ¡La Luta continua!

—Against the Current No. 213, July/August 2021
https://againstthecurrent.org/ATC213/the-windy-city-torture-underground/

Kevin “Rashid” Johnson, Under Attack

By Carole Seligman

1 https://againstthecurrent.org/ATC213/the-windy-city-torture-underground/
[July 28th] after spending only two weeks of what was supposed to be a four-to-six week stay at the CRC [the Ohio prison reception facility], in addition to the brand new charges today [July 29] are an attempt to prevent him from responding to the case in Indiana either by phone or mail. He received a 30-day restriction from the phone, email kiosk, and commissary today for allegedly telling the guards that he was going to send someone to kill them (Rashid doesn’t even talk like that!) What this means is that he will not be able to contact anyone on the outside by phone or email for 30 days. The commissary restriction is to prevent him from buying paper and pencil to write with and be able to respond to the court case.”

On August 2, 2021, Shupavu reported:

“Rashid’s cell has been searched twice this morning as they believe that he is still communicating with the outside. The other prisoners have been instructed not to talk to him or assist him in any way. The pigs are attempting to sow division per usual.”

Also on August 2, Shupavu reported some very disturbing information:

“Well got word again that they’ve moved Rashid to the area where the Aryans are. They have threatened him and said explicitly what they intend on doing. Sergeant Joshua McAllister told Rashid exactly ‘I’m an old school dirty cop. I’ve been doing this since I was a teenager. We know how to set it up and make it look justified. You must not know about us. We are worse than the Klan….We have a unit called J-1 where we execute inmates. We starve ‘em. We hang ‘em...’”

The way we can support and defend Rashid is by contacting the prison authorities to demand:

1. Rashid must have all his property restored to him immediately (including legal papers and personal material.)
2. Restore phone, email, and commissary immediately.

When communicating with prison staff in the different states please refer to the prisoner identification number for Kevin Johnson (Rashid), which is different in each state:

- For Virginia: #1007485
- For Indiana: #264847
- For Ohio: #A787991

Please contact:
Ronald Erdos, Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, Warden (Lucasville)
(740) 259-5544
drc.socf@odrc.state.ohio.us

Joseph Walters, Dep. Director Virginia Department Of Corrections
(804) 887-7982
joseph.walters@vadoc.virginia.gov

James Parks, Interstate Compact Administrator, Virginia
james.parks@vadoc.virginia.gov

Contact Virginia Department Of Corrections authorities because Virginia prisoners transferred on inter-state compacts are supposed to have all the rights of Virginia prisoners. Rashid was originally incarcerated in Virginia before transfers to Oregon, Texas, Florida, Indiana, and now, Ohio.

Write to Kevin “Rashid” Johnson:
Kevin Rashid Johnson
D.O.C. #A787991
P.O. Box 45699
Lucasville, OH 45699
www.rashidmod.com

Self portrait by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson
The psychosis of torture

Some behavioral theorists believe that children who torture animals (those who pull the wings off flies for example,) display early pathological tendencies and will likely become sociopaths or violent psychotics as they age.

What does this say about entire communities that revel in inflicting even greater cruelties on other humans? On this point, I’m thinking of Western slave societies, and abuses described by historians like C.L.R. James, in The Black Jacobins, his renowned account of the slave revolution that overthrew slavery in Haiti. James described such abuses inflicted on slaves for sport, as packing a slave’s rectum with gunpowder and igniting it.

Western slave society has always been barbaric, and it still is. Cruel abuses continue to be inflicted—in U.S. prisons for example, where forced slave labor still abounds. The Southern Ohio Correctional Facility aka Lucasville, where I’m presently imprisoned, provides a perfect example.

I’ve been at Lucasville only a few weeks (having been recently expelled from the Indiana prison system, my sixth interstate prison transfer in nine years, for challenging and exposing abuses there,) and have heard nothing but a steady stream of horror stories of prisoners suffering torment and abuse (from lynchings—hangings staged as suicides—to beatings and starvation) at the hands of staff who come from racially segregated rural white communities, where racism is obviously a deeply ingrained cultural trend.

Guards at Lucasville carry themselves with an air of impunity that comes from working in an environment where abusing disempowered and disadvantaged people is like the air they breathe.

The torment of Robert Scott

While certainly not among the worst incidents of abuse I’ve been told about, the experience of Robert Scott #682746, provides an example of the treatment of prisoners at Lucasville.

On November 4, 2020, Robert, believably suffering from COVID-19, fell ill in his cell, where he began vomiting, and collapsed. Two white guards, C. Scott and Glockner, had a wheelchair summoned, and wheeled him to a holding cell where they handcuffed him.

He was, at all times, conscious and coherent, only very ill. C. Scott disregarded Robert’s complaints of illness and persisted in telling him that he was high—a common accusation guards make to invalidate and discredit any number of issues a prisoner may have, from medical emergencies to mental health crises.

Scott asked Robert a range of questions testing his coherence and awareness of current events and his surroundings, attempting to demonstrate that Robert was high. Robert, however, answered all the questions accurately and persisted that he was ill, not high, and needed medical care.

Instead of addressing his complaint of possible COVID-19 infection, a nurse named Mault who was summoned, proceeded to administer two doses of the counter-overdose drug Narcan to Robert. Scott then hit Robert in the hand and leg with his baton, fracturing his hand, and Glockner punched him in the face and slapped him several times. Scott then retrieved a syringe from nurse Mault and stabbed Robert repeatedly in the face with it and raked the needle across his face.

These guards were making a mockery and sport of Robert’s condition, assaulting him as if attempting to revive an unconscious person, but actually aiming to provoke a defensive reaction to the pain they were inflicting so they could then openly beat him under the guise of attempting to subdue a combative prisoner, which is a common “game” that guards play.

After this sadistic abuse, a lieutenant named Setty provided the false report that would provide cover for the entire affair. Setty filed a trumped-up disciplinary report claiming that Robert confessed to him that he was in fact high from smoking K2, which of course resulted in a finding of guilt and further punishment for the made-up infraction. Slaves have no credibility.

This is how “justice” looks in U.S. slave society. Just like the summary lynchings, burnings and beatings during the antebellum and later Jim Crow eras, carried out as public “sport” by jubilant mobs of “respectable” people. Mobs that were egged on by, and included, government officials. Again, this is the pathology of unfree society: Capitalism and racism.

The fear of exposure of abuse

I think most people would agree that even contemplating what Robert suffered is traumatic; a Black man fallen ill, helpless, handcuffed, was assaulted, drugged, humiliated, then lied on and punished. He tried repeatedly to complain and receive some redress for his abuses and was thwarted at every turn. I read his frustrated attempts.

Again, his experience is by far not among the worst abuses here at Lucasville that I’ve heard about. In fact, officials here don’t want me to hear about any of it. They know I’ll write
about it, publicizing it to the public, and they fear what they can’t control—namely the public.

I was “warned” against doing this while I was at Ohio’s Correctional Reception Center by a Security Threat Group investigator named Nate Harris. He threatened that if I did start “being an asshole,” which he described as writing “radical” articles that generate bad publicity and public protest against the Ohio prison system, my security level would be raised and I’d be thrown into, and kept in, solitary confinement.

Here at Lucasville, although I’m in general population, the entire staff have been telling the prisoners around me not to talk to me, and threatening to ransack their cells, throw them in solitary, etc., if they defy these orders. Several prisoners have been made examples of already.

As with all corruptions, the horrors of slave society thrive in darkness. There are legions of skeletons hanging by their necks in the closets at Lucasville. And I’m as bent as ever on being that “asshole” who helps lift the veil (actually, the white hoods) off the faces of the people who hung them there.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!

Who Is Steven Donziger?
Why is he unjustly persecuted and why should we care?

By Cliff Conner

We should care, first of all, because the principle of “an injury to one is an injury to all” demands it of us. But there is much, much more to the Donziger case than the victimization of a single courageous individual. It should be thought of as a compound or multilevel injustice, with its outrageousness compounding at every level.

The first level—the underlying injustice in the Donziger case—is of the greatest social significance imaginable. It is the Chevron oil company’s decades-long environmental destruction of 1,700 square miles of the Amazonian rainforest in Ecuador. The deadly consequences of that ecological devastation for the Indigenous communities who inhabit the area make Chevron’s misdeeds a crime against humanity. More than 2,000 Ecuadorian Amazonians have died from oil-related environmental cancers and many others have suffered from an epidemic of miscarriages and birth defects.

The second level is Chevron’s weaponizing of the American legal system in an attempt to destroy a human rights attorney who dared to try to hold them accountable. Steven Donziger is that attorney. He was not a lone crusader but part of a legal team that has pursued justice for the Indigenous Ecuadorians for almost 30 years. They won an unprecedented judgment against Chevron in the Ecuadorian courts—an award of more than nine billion dollars to compensate victims of the oil company’s poisonous mess. Chevron, however, has thus far evaded paying it by refusing to acknowledge the court’s ruling, leaving Ecuador, and launching a massive legal counter-attack against Steven Donziger in U.S. courts. The malicious prosecution is designed to intimidate human rights...
lawyers everywhere and to warn them against challenging deep-pocketed and politically-connected corporations. The legal system of the United States has never been so blatantly perverted by corporate power as in this case.

Here is a nutshell account of the very complex history of this decades-long struggle:

In 1964, the Texaco oil company began drilling for oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon, and for decades the corporation treated the public waters and lands of Ecuador as its private garbage dump, dumping billions of gallons of toxic waste and spilling billions of gallons of crude oil. In so doing, it seriously damaged the physical environment, and with it the health of 30,000 Indigenous people who depended on those lands and waters for their lives and livelihoods. All of this was illegal under Ecuadorian and U.S. law, but the dictatorship that had come to power in Ecuador in 1963 with CIA help turned a blind eye to the American oil giant’s wanton pollution. Subsequent governments followed suit for many years.

In 1993, fresh out of Harvard Law School, Steven Donziger was one of a group of attorneys who filed a lawsuit in New York against Texaco on behalf of Indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Amazon who were suffering from the oil company’s unlawful dumping. Texaco and its successor, Chevron, believing Ecuador’s legal system would be easier to manipulate, fought for nine years to have the case tried in Ecuador rather than in the United States. In 2002, the oil company got its wish: The U.S. court ruled that if Chevron would pledge to accept the Ecuadorian courts’ jurisdiction, the case would be tried in Ecuador. Chevron accepted that proviso. In 2006, however, a populist political upsurge brought a government to power in Ecuador that was less susceptible to foreign corporate influence. In that changed political context, Ecuador’s Supreme Court in 2013 awarded a $9.5 billion settlement to Chevron’s indigenous victims. Chevron, unsurprisingly, reneged on its promise to honor the Ecuadorian courts’ ruling.

**The legal system of the United States has never been so blatantly perverted by corporate power as in this case.**

Chevron retaliated by using its massive financial resources and political influence to launch an all-out campaign of demonization against Donziger. Lewis A. Kaplan, a U.S. District judge, has collaborated closely with Chevron in its effort to crush Donziger, and has also enlisted another U.S. District judge, Loretta Preska, in the unholy crusade. Preska is closely allied with the Chevron-funded Federalist Society, which leads a systematic campaign to stack U.S. courts at all levels with rightwing judges.

Judge Kaplan backed a demand by Chevron that Donziger hand over to them his computers, cell phones, and printed files full of privileged and confidential information. When Donziger refused, as any ethical lawyer would and should have, Kaplan charged him with criminal contempt and ordered that he be held under house arrest. No lawyer who has ever been held for more than 90 days. As of July 6, 2021, Donziger had spent 700 days in home confinement. Meanwhile, when public prosecutors declined to take on the case, Judge Kaplan appointed private lawyers—from a firm that has Chevron as a client!—to act as prosecutors.

In the past year, international efforts to defend Donziger have gained traction. Sixty-eight Nobel laureates, including ten who had received the Nobel Peace Prize, demanded that Donziger be freed, and that Chevron be held accountable for its criminal poisoning of the Ecuadorian Amazon. And on September 1, 2020, more than 200 lawyers filed a judicial complaint documenting Judge Kaplan’s numerous violations of the judicial code of conduct in what they called his “abusive targeting of human rights advocate Steven Donziger.” The complaint was also signed by 37 legal organizations representing 500,000 lawyers in eighty countries around the world.

The struggle continues.

- Drop the prosecution against Steven Donziger!
- Free Steven Donziger from house arrest!
- Hold Chevron fully accountable for its unspeakable crimes against the indigenous people of Ecuador!

For more information about the case:

- Free Donziger video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju3fzq2EswuA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju3fzq2EswuA)
- Democracy Now! on Donziger case (video): [https://twitter.com/SDonziger/status/1372742350812766213](https://twitter.com/SDonziger/status/1372742350812766213)
Daniel Hale, a former U.S. Air Force intelligence analyst, was sentenced to 45 months in prison Tuesday, July 27, 2021, after pleading guilty to leaking a trove of government documents exposing the inner workings and severe civilian costs of the U.S. military’s drone program. Appearing in an Alexandria, Virginia, courtroom, the 33-year-old Hale told U.S. District Judge Liam O’Grady that he believed it “was necessary to dispel the lie that drone warfare keeps us safe, that our lives are worth more than theirs.”

“I am here because I stole something that was never mine to take—precious human life,” Hale said. “I couldn’t keep living in a world in which people pretend that things weren’t happening that were. Please, your honor, forgive me for taking papers instead of human lives.”

In delivering his judgement, O’Grady said that Hale was “not being prosecuted for speaking out about the drone program killing innocent people” and that he “could have been a whistleblower…without taking any of these documents.”

Though the nearly four-year sentence fell short of the maximum sentence of 11 years behind bars sought by federal prosecutors, the conviction marked another victory for the U.S. government in an ongoing crackdown on national security leaks that has spanned multiple presidential administrations.

Hale was indicted by a grand jury and arrested in 2019 on a series of counts related to the unauthorized disclosure of national defense and intelligence information and the theft of government property. In addition to documents related to how the government chooses its drone strike targets—and information detailing how often people who are not the intended targets of those strikes are nonetheless killed—Hale was also linked to the release of a secret, though unclassified, rulebook detailing how the U.S. government places individuals in its sprawling system of watchlists. Long shrouded in secrecy, the release of the rulebook has been celebrated by advocacy groups as a triumph of the post-9/11 era.

Since his indictment more than two years ago, government filings have strongly implied that The Intercept was the recipient of Hale’s disclosures. In a statement on Tuesday, July 27 2021, Intercept Editor-in-Chief Betsy Reed said, “Daniel Hale will spend years in prison for leaking documents that the government implied were published by The Intercept. These documents revealed the truth about the U.S. government’s secretive, murderous drone war, including that the killing of civilians was far more widespread than previously acknowledged. The Intercept will not comment on our sources. But whoever brought the documents in question to light undoubtedly served a noble public purpose.”

She added: “Hale was also charged with disclosing a secret rule book detailing the parallel judicial system for watchlisting people and categorizing them as known or suspected terrorists without needing to prove they did anything wrong. Under these rules, people, including U.S. citizens, can be barred from flying or detained in airports and at borders while being denied the ability to challenge government declarations about them. The disclosure of the watchlisting rule book led to dozens of legal actions and important court victories for the protection of civil liberties.”

The Espionage Act

As has become standard practice in the U.S., Hale was charged under the Espionage Act, and he pleaded guilty to one count in March. Under the highly
controversial 1917 law, defendants cannot point to their efforts to inform the public about government actions and operations as a defense for leaking classified information. President Barack Obama weaponized the anti-spying law as a tool to hammer government employees who were sources for national security stories, particularly those that were unflattering for the government. The Trump administration continued the practice and now, so too, has the Biden administration.

“In today’s sentencing, the court did reject the prosecution’s extreme demands, but Hale’s prison sentence is nonetheless another tragic example of how the government misuses the Espionage Act to punish alleged journalistic sources as spies, a practice that damages human rights, press freedom, and democracy,” Reed added in her statement.

Hale’s support team, in a statement following the sentencing, said: “everyone agrees #DanielHale is not a spy. He is a deeply honorable man who is being punished simply for acting on his conscience and telling the truth.”

Ahead of his sentencing this week, Hale filed an 11-page handwritten letter to the court detailing the motivations behind his actions. In vivid detail, Hale recalled his own experience locating targets for American drone strikes. By some estimates, U.S. drone operations abroad, conducted by both the military and the CIA, have killed between 9,000 and 17,000 people since 2004, including as many as 2,200 children and multiple U.S. citizens. Those estimates, however, underrate the true cost of remote American warfare—as Hale noted in his letter to the court last week, the U.S. military has a practice of labeling all individuals killed in such operations as “enemies killed in action” unless proven otherwise.

“With drone warfare, sometimes nine-out-of-ten people killed are innocent,” Hale said on Tuesday. “You have to kill part of your conscience to do your job.”

In arguing that Hale should receive a maximum sentence of more than a decade in prison, the government repeatedly referred to secret evidence—unavailable for public review—purporting to show that the Islamic State had circulated Hale’s disclosures online, thus putting American lives at risk. Harry P. Cooper, a former senior official in the CIA and noted agency expert on classified materials who reviewed the documents and provided a declaration in Hale’s case, offered a starkly different interpretation.

“The disclosure of these documents, at the time they were disclosed and made public, did not present any substantial risk of harm to the United States or to national security,” Cooper said in a sworn declaration. “In short, an adversary who has gained a tactical advantage by receiving secret information would never publicize their possession of it.”

In their sentencing filing, Hale’s defense lawyers said that he had “felt extraordinary guilt for having been complicit in what he viewed as unjustifiable killings” through his involvement in the drone program and argued that his disclosures were compelled by a sense of moral duty. In motions filed in the past week, government prosecutors sought to rebut this picture, painting Hale as a self-interested egomaniac who risked his freedom to ingratiate himself with the journalists he admired and compared his justifications to those of a heroin dealer.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Gordon Kromberg dismissed that reasoning, arguing that Hale’s case in fact deserved a harsher sentence than other prior whistleblower cases on the convoluted basis that, unlike in those cases, it was difficult to substantiate what harm his disclosures had actually done. “We do not know whether this information already has been or will be used in the future by terrorists or other foreign adversaries,” Kromberg wrote. “What we can be sure of is that Hale’s actions risked damage to the safety and security of Americans in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.”

The Justice Department also rejected Hale’s argument that he was providing a public service by revealing information about covert military operations that had killed civilians. “According to Hale, what he did was legally wrong but morally right,” prosecutors wrote. “In analogous circumstances, no one would award such a reduction to a heroin dealer who admitted that he violated the law by distributing heroin, but simultaneously asserted that by distributing the heroin he was helping society rather than harming it.”

Hale is a descendant of Nathan Hale, the American patriot who was hanged by the British for stealing documents in 1776. Addressing the court Tuesday, Hale quoted the words often attributed to his famed ancestor: “My only regret is that I have but one life to give to my country, whether here or in prison.” As he did in the letter he submitted to the court last week, Hale, in his appearance before the judge, focused his attention on the victims of U.S. foreign policy.

“I believe that it is wrong to kill,” Hale said, “but it is especially wrong to kill the defenseless.”

“The Intercept, July 27, 2021

Day In The Death Of British Justice

By John Pilger

August 16, 2021—I sat in Court 4 in the Royal Courts of Justice in London this week with Stella Moris, Julian Assange’s partner. I have known Stella for as long as I have known Julian. She, too, is a voice of freedom, coming from a family that fought the fascism of Apartheid. Today, her name was uttered in court by a barrister and a judge, forgettable people were it not for the power of their endowed privilege.

The barrister, Clair Dobbin, is in the pay of the regime in Washington, first Trump’s, then Biden’s. She is America’s hired gun, or “silk,” as she would prefer. Her target is Julian Assange, who has committed no crime and has performed an historic public service by exposing the criminal actions and secrets on which governments, especially those claiming to be democracies, base their authority.

For those who may have forgotten, WikiLeaks, of which Assange is founder and publisher, exposed the secrets and lies that led to the invasion of Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the murderous role of the Pentagon in dozens of countries, the blueprint for the 20-year catastrophe in Afghanistan, the attempts by Washington to overthrow elected governments, such as Venezuela’s, the collusion between nominal political opponents (Bush and Obama) to stifle a torture investigation and the CIA’s Vault 7 campaign that turned your mobile phone, even your TV set, into a spy in your midst.

WikiLeaks released almost a million documents from Russia which allowed Russian citizens to stand up for their rights. It revealed the Australian government had colluded with the U.S. against its own citizen, Assange. It named those Australian politicians who have “informed” for the U.S. It made the connection between the Clinton Foundation and the rise of jihadism in American-armed states in the Gulf.

There is more: WikiLeaks disclosed the U.S. campaign to suppress wages in sweatshop countries like Haiti, India’s campaign of torture in Kashmir, the British government’s secret agreement to shield “U.S. interests” in its official Iraq inquiry and the British Foreign Office’s plan to create a fake “marine protection zone” in the Indian Ocean to cheat the Chagos islanders out of their right of return.

In other words, WikiLeaks has given us real news about those who govern us and take us to war, not the preordained, repetitive spin that fills newspapers and television screens. This is real journalism; and for the crime of real journalism, Assange has spent most of the past decade in one form of incarceration or another, including Belmarsh prison, a horrific place.

Diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome, he is a gentle, intellectual visionary driven by his belief that a democracy is not a democracy unless it is transparent, and accountable.

Yesterday, the United States sought the approval of Britain’s High Court to extend the terms of its appeal against a decision by a district judge, Vanessa Baraitser, in January to bar Assange’s extradition. Baraitser accepted the deeply disturbing evidence of a number of experts that Assange would find a way to take his own life—the direct result of what Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations Rapporteur on Torture, described as the craven “mobbing” of Assange by governments—and their media echoes.

Those of us who were in the Old Bailey last September to hear
Kopelman’s evidence were shocked and moved. I sat with Julian’s father, John Shipton, whose head was in his hands. The court was also told about the discovery of a razor blade in Julian’s Belmarsh cell and that he had made desperate calls to the Samaritans and written notes and much else that filled us with more than sadness.

Watching the lead barrister acting for Washington, James Lewis—a man from a military background who deploys a cringingly theatrical “aha!” formula with defense witnesses—reduce these facts to “malingering” and smearing witnesses, especially Kopelman, we were heartened by Kopelman’s revealing response that Lewis’s abuse was “a bit rich” as Lewis himself had sought to hire Kopelman’s expertise in another case.

Lewis’s sidekick is Clair Dobbin, and Wednesday was her day. Completing the smearing of Professor Kopelman was down to her. An American with some expertise in another case.

Dobbin said Kopelman had “misled” Judge Baraitser in September because he had not disclosed that Julian Assange and Stella Moris were partners, and their two young children, Gabriel and Max, were conceived during the period Assange had taken refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

The implication was that this somehow lessened Kopelman’s medical diagnosis: that Julian, locked up in solitary in Belmarsh prison and facing extradition to the U.S. on bogus “espionage” charges, had suffered severe psychotic depression and had planned, if he had not already attempted, to take his own life.

For her part, Judge Baraitser saw no contradiction. The full nature of the relationship between Stella and Julian had been explained to her in March 2020, and Professor Kopelman had made full reference to it in his report in August 2020. So, the judge and the court knew all about it before the main extradition hearing last September. In her judgement in January, Baraitser said this:

“[Professor Kopelman] assessed Mr. Assange during the period May to December 2019 and was best placed to consider at first-hand his symptoms. He has taken great care to provide an informed account of Mr. Assange’s background and psychiatric history. He has given close attention to the prison medical notes and provided a detailed summary annexed to his December report. He is an experienced clinician, and he was well aware of the possibility of exaggeration and malingering. I had no reason to doubt his clinical opinion.”

She added that she had “not been misled” by the exclusion in Kopelman’s first report of the Stella-Julian relationship and that she understood that Kopelman was protecting the privacy of Stella and her two young children.

In fact, as I know well, the family’s safety was under constant threat to the point when an embassy security guard confessed, he had been told to steal one of the baby’s nappies so that a CIA-contracted company could analyze its DNA. There has been a stream of unpublicized threats against Stella and her children.

For the U.S. and its legal hirelings in London, damaging the credibility of a renowned expert by suggesting he withheld this information was a way, they no doubt reckoned, to rescue their crumbling case against Assange. In June, the Icelandic newspaper Stundin reported that a key prosecution witness against Assange has admitted fabricating his evidence. The one “hacking” charge the Americans hoped to bring against Assange if they could get their hands on him depended on this source and witness, Sigurdur Thordarson, an FBI informant.

Thordarson had worked as a volunteer for WikiLeaks in Iceland between 2010 and 2011. In 2011, as several criminal charges were brought against him, he contacted the FBI and offered to become an informant in return for immunity from all prosecution. It emerged that he was a convicted fraudster who embezzled $55,000 from WikiLeaks and served two years in prison. In 2015, he was sentenced to three years for sex offenses against teenage boys. The Washington Post described Thordarson’s credibility as the “core” of the case against Assange.

Yesterday, Lord Chief Justice Holroyde made no mention of this witness. His concern was that it was “arguable” that Judge Baraitser had attached too much weight to the evidence of Professor Kopelman, a man revered in his field. He said it was “very unusual” for an appeal court to have to reconsider evidence from an expert accepted by a lower court, but he agreed with Ms. Dobbin it was “misleading” even though he accepted Kopelman’s “understandable human response” to protect the privacy of Stella and the children.

If you can unravel the arcane logic of this, you have a better grasp than I who have sat through
this case from the beginning. It is clear Kopelman misled nobody. Judge Baraitser—whose hostility to Assange personally was a presence in her court—said that she was not misled; it was not an issue; it did not matter. So why had Lord Chief Justice Holroyde spun the language with its weasel legalize and sent Julian back to his cell and its nightmares? There, he now waits for the High Court’s final decision in October—for Julian Assange, a life-or-death decision.

And why did Holroyde send Stella from the court trembling with anguish? Why is this case “unusual?” Why did he throw the gang of prosecutor-thugs at the Department of Justice in Washington—who got their big chance under Trump, having been rejected by Obama—a life raft as their rotting, corrupt case against a principled journalist sunk as surely as the Titanic?

This does not necessarily mean that in October the full bench of the High Court will order Julian to be extradited. In the upper reaches of the masonry that is the British judiciary there are, I understand, still those who believe in real law and real justice from which the term “British justice” takes its sanctified reputation in the land of the Magna Carta. It now rests on their ermined shoulders whether that history lives on or dies.

I sat with Stella in the court’s colonnade while she drafted words to say to the crowd of media and well-wishers outside in the sunshine. Clip-clopping along came Clair Dobbin, spruced, ponytail swinging, bearing her carton of files: a figure of certainty: she who said Julian Assange was “not so ill” that he would consider suicide. How does she know?

Has Ms. Dobbin worked her way through the medieval maze at Belmarsh to sit with Julian in his yellow arm band, as Professors Kopelman and Melzer have done, and Stella has done, and I have done? Never mind. The Americans have now “promised” not to put him in a hellhole, just as they “promised” not to torture Chelsea Manning, just as they promised….

And has she read the WikiLeaks’ leak of a Pentagon document dated March 15, 2009? This foretold the current war on journalism and the vendetta against Assange. U.S. intelligence, it said, intended to destroy WikiLeaks’ and Julian Assange’s “center of gravity” with threats and “criminal prosecution.” Read all 32 pages and you are left in no doubt that silencing and criminalizing independent journalism was the aim, smear the method.

I tried to catch Ms. Dobbin’s gaze, but she was on her way: job done.

Outside, Stella struggled to contain her emotion. This is one brave woman, as indeed her man is an exemplar of courage. “What has not been discussed today,” said Stella, “is why I feared for my safety and the safety of our children and for Julian’s life. The constant threats and intimidation we endured for years, which has been terrorizing us and has been terrorizing Julian for ten years. We have a right to live, we have a right to exist, and we have a right for this nightmare to come to an end once and for all.”

—newmatilda.com, August 16, 2021

featuring a broad number of groups on September 27, the opening day of the upcoming Supreme Court session. Many women’s rights organizations, health care justice groups, public sector unions, organizations from the LGBTQ community and more, will appeal to the public to put the Court on notice that “We Will Not Go Back!” to the days of coat-hanger and back-alley abortions. Topping their list of demands is “No Abortion Bans, not now, not ever! Defend Roe!”

Appreciating that this is a national battle, and that low/no income communities and people of color are hit the hardest by restrictive abortion laws and bans, Chicago for Abortion Rights is also reaching out to organizations around the country, seeking to encourage nationally coordinated actions. The immediate goal is to defend Roe and the rights it protects as well as a vow to fight for “Accessible abortion for all!”

Linda Loew was active in the movement for legal abortion before Roe v. Wade, attending the founding conference of the Women’s National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC). She was an activist in WONAAC chapters in New York City and Binghamton, NY, leading up to the Roe ruling. She is a founding member and current activist in Chicago for Abortion Rights.

—World Outlook, August 8, 2021


Dear Socialist Viewpoint,

PBS News Hour along with a professor from the Miami Cuban exile community, reported how Cubans were demonstrating for freedom nationwide. Rebell ing against the economic hardship brought on by authoritarian communism. The Miami professor even blamed the Cuban government for not being able to provide Tylenol for their sick and languishing.

After the counter-revolutionary Russian Stalinist bureaucracy dropped its financial and material supports, the Cuban Communist Party was left with no choice but to work with international capital and develop a tourist industry. PBS News Hour allowed the gusano [Spanish for worm] Professor to say that the tourist industry was built to benefit the party. This is simply not the case.

Daycare centers, schools, and infrastructure needed to maintain a semblance of civilization had to be paid for. When the tourist industry brought luxury and good food, eye-witnessed by Cubans who live on rations and whatever they can wheel and deal out of the black market, it made Cuban citizens with no connection to the tourist industries pissed off. Fidel Castro answered this by saying that the tourist industry is solely to earn money for the island’s social programs.

Remittances from the United States were cut off by the Trump administration. Dollars that were sent from the exiles helped Cubans weather the worst aspects of the blockade and Russian withdrawal of financial support.

The blockade was ratcheted up by the Trump Administration just in time for the COVID-19 outbreak.

If the Cubans think that driving the Cuban Communist Party from power will make their lives better, it will not. The tremendous wealth of the United States and the rest of the rich capitalist states will not be Cuba’s future. It will be that of Columbia, Guatemala, Haiti. Theirs will be a world of food insecurity and high rents on their already decrepit housing.

International capitalism’s dictatorship has turned our world, in some places, into a literal furnace incinerating our environment. The U.S. vanguard of working-class thinkers like Mumia Abu-Jamal and Kevin “Rashid” Johnson endure prisons that are administrated to strip men and women of their humanity.

Cuba’s youth organized into the July 26th Movement in the 1950s to rebuild their country with blood and sacrifice. Down with the U.S. capitalist class, the real terror state of the world. May Cuba’s majority realize that only through their revolutionary government do they have a chance to break the blockade.

The world’s oppressed are waking up and moving. It can’t be fast enough to break open the cells of the American gulags and save the Cuban revolution from international capital roosting like vultures to devour the historic gains of its revolution.

—Brian Schwartz, July 17, 2021
The Socialist Viewpoint Publishing Association publishes Socialist Viewpoint in the interests of the working class.

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

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Note to Readers:

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

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

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

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

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

The “In the Spirit of Mandela Coalition” invites your participation and endorsement of the planned October 2021 International Tribunal. The Tribunal will be charging the United States government, its states, and specific agencies with human and civil rights violations against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

The Tribunal will be charging human and civil rights violations for:

- Racist police killings of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Hyper incarcerations of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Political incarceration of Civil Rights/National Liberation era revolutionaries and activists, as well as present day activists,
- Environmental racism and its impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Public Health racism and disparities and its impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and
- Genocide of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people as a result of the historic and systemic charges of all the above.

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

The 2021 International Tribunal has a unique set of outcomes and an opportunity to organize on a mass level across many social justice arenas. Upon the verdict, the results of the Tribunal will:

- Codify and publish the content and results of the Tribunal to be offered in High Schools and University curriculums,
- Provide organized, accurate information for reparation initiatives and community and human rights work,
- Strengthen the demand to free all Political Prisoners and establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission mechanism to lead to their freedom,
- Provide the foundation for civil action in federal and state courts across the United States,
- Present a stronger case, building upon previous and respected human rights initiatives, on the international stage,
- Establish a healthy and viable massive national network of community organizations, activists, clergy, academics, and lawyers concerned with challenging human rights abuses on all levels and enhancing the quality of life for all people, and
- Establish the foundation to build a “Peoples’ Senate” representative of all 50 states, Indigenous Tribes, and major religions.

Endorsements are $25. Your endorsement will add to the volume of support and input vital to ensuring the success of these outcomes moving forward, and to the Tribunal itself. It will be transparently used to immediately move forward with the Tribunal outcomes.

We encourage you to add your name and organization to attend the monthly Tribunal updates and to sign on to one of the Tribunal Committees. (3rd Saturday of each month from 12:00 NOON to 2:00 P.M. eastern time). Submit your name by emailing: spiritofmandela1@gmail.com

Please endorse now: http://spiritofmandela.org/endorse/

In solidarity,
Dr. A’isha Mohammad, Sekou Odinga, Matt Meyer, Jihad Abdulmumit, Coordinating Committee

Created in 2018, In the Spirit of Mandela Coalition is a growing grouping of organizers, academics, clergy, attorneys, and organizations committed to working together against the systemic, historic, and ongoing human rights violations and abuses committed by the USA against Black, Brown, and Indigenous People. The Coalition recognizes and affirms the rich history of diverse and militant freedom fighters Nelson Mandela, Winnie Mandela, Graca Machel Mandela, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and many more. It is in their Spirit and affirming their legacy that we work.

https://spiritofmandela.org/campaigns/
The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. —Karl Marx

Capitalism's Never-ending Wars - Page 4
Haiti: A History of Imperialist Domination Continues - Page 6
In Defense of the Cuban Revolution - Page 14
Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, Under Attack - Page 55

On the Front Cover:
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, May 21, 2021: a group of student protesters striking for climate change action holding signs and banners and wearing COVID-19 masks and school uniforms. (Shutterstock)
Read Capitalism's Never-ending Wars on page 4.

Flags of Cuba, left, and Haiti, right. Read A Tale of Two Countries on page 12.

Glen Ford participated in the "Free Mumia—Youth Rise Up Against U.S. Empire" event in Philadelphia on December 7, 2019. (Shutterstock)
Read Glen Ford: Revolutionary, Friend. Leader, Lover of Black People on page 45.


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.”