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SocialistViewpoint

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

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WORKERS MAKE THE WORLD RUN...



WORKERS SHOULD RUN THE WORLD

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How Many Bombs Did the United States Drop in 2016?

BY MICAH ZENKO



As President Obama enters the final weeks of his presidency, there will be ample assessments of his foreign military approach, which has focused on reducing U.S. ground combat troops (with the notable exception of the Afghanistan surge), supporting local security partners, and authorizing the expansive use of air power. Whether this strategy “works”—*i.e.*, reduces the threat posed by extremists operating from those countries and improves overall security and governance on the ground—is highly contested. Yet, for better or worse, these are the central tenets of the Obama doctrine.

In President Obama’s last year in office, the United States dropped 26,171 bombs in seven countries. This estimate is undoubtedly low, considering reliable data is only available for airstrikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya, and a single “strike,” according to the Pentagon’s definition, can involve multiple bombs or munitions. In 2016, the United States dropped 3,027 more bombs—and in one more country, Libya—than in 2015.

Most (24,287) were dropped in Iraq and Syria. This number is based on the percentage of total coalition airstrikes

carried out in 2016 by the United States in Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), the counter-Islamic State campaign. The Pentagon publishes a running count of bombs dropped by the United States and its partners, and we found data for 2016 using OIR public

then, the United States dropped 24,287 (79 percent of 30,743).

To determine how many U.S. bombs were dropped on each Iraq and Syria, we looked at the percentage of total U.S. OIR airstrikes conducted in each country. They were nearly evenly split, with 49.8 percent (or 2,941 airstrikes) carried out in Iraq, and 50.2 percent (or 2,963 airstrikes) in Syria. Therefore, the number of bombs dropped were also nearly the same in the two countries (12,095 in Iraq; 12,192 in Syria). Last year, the United States conducted approximately 67 percent of airstrikes in Iraq in 2016, and 96 percent of those in Syria.

This blog post was coauthored with my research associate, Jennifer Wilson.

—Council on Foreign Relations, January 5, 2017

<http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2017/01/05/bombs-dropped-in-2016/>

¹ <https://archive.org/web/>

In President Obama’s last year in office, the United States dropped 26,171 bombs in seven countries.

strike releases and the handy tool, *Internet Archive Wayback Machine*.¹ Using this data, we found that in 2016, the United States conducted about 79 percent (5,904) of the coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, which together total 7,473. Of the total 30,743 bombs that the coalition dropped,

U.S. BOMBS DROPPED IN 2016 (All Weapons Platforms)

Syria	12,192
Iraq	12,095
Afghanistan	1,337
Libya	496
Yemen	34
Somalia	14
Pakistan	3
Total	26,171

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What the World Needs Now is Socialism

Democracy, economic and social equality for all on a world scale

By BONNIE WEINSTEIN

Lets get this straight; the USA was NEVER a democracy. This country was founded on the mass murder of tens-of-millions of native Indians that inhabited this land. U.S. capitalists for-tressed this invasion on the backs of slaves captured from the African continent and forcefully put to work on the plantations owned by the white man; the annexation of most of Mexico's territory and the slaughter of its native inhabitants; all of Alaska and Hawaii; and on the backs of workers in the U.S. territories of Puerto Rico, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa.

The new, white rulers were all men. Their "democracy" was only among white, male property owners. Even white women didn't get the vote until 1920. African Americans were not allowed to somewhat-freely exercise their right to vote until August 6, 1965! And tens-of-thousands who have been convicted of a felony have lost the right to vote altogether. And those incarcerated still work as slaves for capitalist enterprise.

Capitalism is a deadly military dictatorship

According to the *Washington Post's* "Fatal Force" count, that is updated daily,¹ 963 people have been shot and killed by police in 2016! The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Our communities are occupied by a super-militarized police force. Our public schools are crumbling and overcrowded. Our healthcare and college education is un-affordable for most people. We have no say as to whether or not to use our precious resources to go to war and manufacture weapons of mass destruction. We have no say of what we must pay for housing, food, clothing, energy, water, access to the Internet, garbage pick-

up—everything we are charged is dictated by the wealthy, capitalist elite—including taxes! They make the laws that benefit them, at our expense. They don't pay the bulk of taxes, we do.

It is a world built upon the enslavement of the working class. That's what capitalism is, the military-enforced enslavement of workers for the benefit of the capitalist class. That's who the capitalist candidates in every country represent and give their allegiance to.

Workers' power is based upon our unity and solidarity for a better world for all

The capitalists promote class, racial, religious, ethnic, gender and educational divides to keep us fighting amongst each other, the purpose of which is to make us blind to our overwhelming common needs and interests. This is how they preserve their power and control over the profits we working people create with our labor.

None of us have the right to vote for what we want; we only have the right to vote between the candidates the wealthy elite present to us—their candidates.

A real democracy is when working people get to decide the issues that affect our lives; like whether or not healthcare should be free and available to all; which, by the way, is what the majority of people in this country want! And all the other issues that effect our lives like wages, housing, education, maintaining a healthy environment on our land, in our homes, and in our workplaces, and bringing an end to the destructive wars that further divide and oppress us.

Capitalism is an irrational system designed to increase the rate of profits for the wealthy by any means necessary—including robbing us of our

basic human rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Under capitalism, workers are only entitled to what we can pay for. Our earnings are dictated only by how hard we fight for them. Nothing is given to us that we haven't had to fight for!

The choices the American working class had in the so-called "democratic electoral process" have become the epitome of lesser-evil politics and the opposite of democracy. The capitalist class and their money dictate our electoral choices—insuring that we have no say in the decision-making that will actually control our lives.

The 2016 presidential electoral campaign had everything—a so-called Socialist contender, Bernie Sanders, who lead rebellious youth right back to the camp of Hillary Clinton; the Green Party campaign that led a reform campaign for capitalism that failed to bring about any reforms. And, in fact, the Green Party raised \$7 million for a recount of the vote for Hillary Clinton in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania—firmly aligning them with the Democratic Party!

An independent, working class party can never align itself with the parties of the capitalist class! That is an oxymoron.

And what did we get? The election of Donald Trump, idiot and political "new-comer"—a demagogue that appealed to a populous sick and tired of the *status quo*, yet still divided along racial, religious, ethnic, gender, educational and class lines—those who still believe that what's good for capitalism is good for them.

Workers' future under capitalism is dismal

According to a December 6, 2016 *New York Times* article by Patricia Cohen titled, "A Bigger Economic Pie,

but a Smaller Slice for Half of the U.S.,”

“Stagnant wages have sliced the share of income collected by the bottom half of the population to 12.5 percent in 2014, from 20 percent of the total in 1980. Where did that money go? Essentially, to the top one percent, whose share of the nation’s income nearly doubled to more than 20 percent during that same 34-year period. Average incomes grew by 61 percent. But nearly \$7 out of every additional \$10 went to those in the top tenth of the income scale. Inequality has soared over that period. In 1980, the researchers found, someone in the top one percent earned on average \$428,200 a year—about 27 times more than the typical person in the bottom half, whose annual income equaled \$16,000. ...Today, half of American adults are still pretty much earning that same \$16,000 on average—in 1980 dollars, adjusted for inflation—while members of the top one percent now bring home \$1,304,800—81 times as much.”

Clearly we are in a life and death struggle. Our living conditions and the planet itself are being assaulted by the capitalist system from all directions—all to make a bigger profit! The planet is on the verge of catastrophic climate change due to capitalism’s thoughtless plunder of the environment that will devastate the poorest among us first.

Socialism—an economy based upon production for need and want, and not profit—is the only solution

It is up to us to turn all this around because it is in the interests of the vast majority of humanity and the other cohabitants of our planet to do so. It’s our only hope for the future. If we don’t take charge of these things ourselves the capitalist system will continue along its inevitable path to environmental destruction.

The fact is, capitalism is a totally insufficient, dying system. It is chaotic and wasteful, both in human terms and

the environment. Nothing is planned rationally according to what people and the planet need to thrive. Its only plan is to increase the rate of profit for the rich. All social needs under capitalism are an impediment to that goal.

But it doesn’t have to be that way. There is an alternative to capitalism.

Socialism is a rational alternative to capitalism—a real democratic alternative—that guarantees basic human rights to everyone on an equal basis. Guaranteeing that everyone has the right to food, housing, education and healthcare is paramount to democracy. In fact, economic and social equality is the essence of democracy and the antithesis of capitalism.

...economic and social equality is the essence of democracy and the antithesis of capitalism

Cuba and socialism

This was brought home to me upon the death of Fidel Castro and the massive outpouring of the Cuban people to mourn him.

The U.S. mainstream media demonized Castro as a bloodthirsty dictator who ruled Cuba with an iron hand—a dictator who kept his people starving, without basic freedoms, and under strict military rule.

If you listened and believed this propaganda you would think the people of Cuba would be dancing in the streets upon his death. It happened in Miami among Cuban dissidents of the revolution, but that did not happen in Cuba.

In a December 3, 2016 *New York Times* photo essay by Thomas Munita, Mauricio Lima and Azam Ahmed titled, “A Nation in Mourning: Images of Cuba After Fidel Castro,” one of the

photos in particular struck me. It was a photo of Cuban military personnel standing on the side of the road waiting for Fidel’s ashes to pass by. Hundreds-of-thousands of people did the same.

But what really struck me was that the military personnel were completely unarmed! In fact, it occurred to me at that moment that in all the nine days of news photos of the masses of Cuban people out in the streets to mourn the passing of Fidel you see no armed military or police; no armored tanks with sharpshooters on their gun turrets as we’ve seen commonly on the streets of Baltimore, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Oakland—and on the plains of North Dakota! No police helicopters flying overhead! No riots! No shootouts!

In fact, there has never been such a scene here in the U.S. Here the local police are armed to the teeth with military-grade armor and weapons watching us at all times!

Even the vehicle carrying the ashes of Fidel was open and unarmed!

The only way this could happen is that the Cuban people are overwhelmingly and fundamentally in support of their revolution.

The Cuban example

Cuba is a very poor country. They have suffered over 50 years of a U.S. embargo that prevented them from trading for goods and services their tiny country could not provide on its own. Yet while the Cuban people are poor, Cuba manages to provide them with certain inalienable rights. Food, housing, healthcare and education are considered rights in Cuba. And their education is not limited to “common core” subjects. Cuban children can pursue the arts, sports, the sciences, free of charge from preschool to advanced University degrees. Cuba has one of the largest medical schools in the world with students from around the world as well as Cubans. Everyone is guaranteed housing. No one goes hungry or homeless.

They have a different decision-making process than we do. They decide on policy and issues on the job, in their communities and at their schools.

The only way that hundreds-of-thousands of people can take to the streets of their own accord, without any armed military or police force towering over them, in mourning of the leader of their revolution, is if the Cuban people think of the government as *their* government—functioning for their common good, and in the interests of all Cubans.

One man or government cannot dictate over its people without a massive military and police force like the United States must have to keep the power in the hands of its wealthy elite.

The Cuban people respected Fidel because he fought to bring economic and social equality to his country as best they could under the circumstances.

The images of the massive, peaceful turnout of Cubans mourning the loss of Fidel speak for themselves! Clearly the “dictatorial” Cuban government

didn't feel the need to bear arms against its own people!

What we can do

We can learn from the Cuban people. We can organize ourselves democratically to fight for economic and social equality and basic human rights for all. That's what the Cuban revolution was all about. We must begin to organize an independent party based upon the needs and rights of the masses of working people to the exclusion of capitalists.

This requires that we design and participate in a democratic decision-making process among ourselves. We have to come up with a way to educate ourselves, and come up with a plan of how we can use the profits of our labor to improve the quality of all our lives. We must organize society to satisfy people's needs and wants and restore the health of our planet—to hell with profits for the wealthy elite.

We need to form an independent, democratically organized, mass working class party that has the power to challenge the rule of the “one percent” not just here in the U.S., but across the globe.

We need a party that is based on solidarity and unity among workers in our fight for economic and social equality and justice—a party powerful enough to overthrow capitalism, and actually establish socialism—a party that understands that an injury to one is an injury to all.

Basically, economic and social equality *is* democracy. Only through the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism can we finally achieve democracy, true freedom, economic and social equality, and justice for all.

We have nothing to lose but our chains and a world to win!

WORKERS MAKE THE WORLD RUN...



1 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/>

Bankruptcy of the Liberal Establishment, and the (Stolen) Election of Donald Trump

BY CHRIS KINDER

U.S. politics took a sharp right turn in the elections of 2016, with ramifications that are still unraveling. The victory of a sexist and racist outsider like Donald Trump, brash and irreverent fraud that he is, was quite a comeuppance to the political establishment, both liberal and conservative. With virtually no support from any ruling-class power centers like Wall Street, the media or Republican bigwigs, and nothing to recommend him besides the appeal of his outrageous off-the-cuff diatribes and slanders, his campaign managed to upset the applecart of both Republican and Democratic Party complacency. Yet everything about this startling upset is based on misinformation and false analyses, as well as significant voter suppression. Such is the state of things in the capitalist/imperialist U.S. in the 21st Century.

“Cholera vs. Gonorrhea”

The choice, as Julian Assange of *WikiLeaks* said, was like picking between “cholera and gonorrhea.” However, Trump’s victory represented a rejection of the elites of both major bourgeois political parties. He swept away his would-be Republican rivals in the primary like so many flies off his back. His ready contempt for Clinton’s ties to Wall Street and both parties’ connection to devastating trade deals struck a chord with working people who have suffered from job loss and impoverishment since the 1970s. And Clinton and Obama’s arrogant contempt for Trump’s working class supporters as “deplorable,” “irredeemable” and “wedded to their guns and religion,” helped pave his way. In short, Trump correctly identified both party establishments as upper-class clubs in which contempt for the cast-off masses of lower middle-class and working people is rampant.

But it would be a mistake to identify Trump’s racist, sexist and reactionary big mouth as representing the views of most of those people. Given all those who didn’t vote or were prevented from doing so by voter ID laws, voter suppression measures, and other means, Trump was actually only elected by about one quarter of all eligible voters. And while his victory has led to an ominous surge of bigoted activism and racist attacks—KKK honcho David Duke was ecstatic at Trump’s win—this does not represent mass endorsement of Trump’s policies. Racism runs deep in the U.S., but working people are generally not for a crackdown on Blacks or immigrants, nor are they yearning to prevent a minimum wage hike!

Working class motivations

A solid majority is for increasing the minimum wage; and a majority is against building a wall on the border with Mexico, and for allowing immigrants to stay with the right to apply for citizenship, a number which is up from earlier years. On the healthcare question, the details are tricky, since most national polls simply ask: are you for or against Obamacare? Most respond in the negative; and while most of those say they are for fixing it rather than abolishing it, this leaves open how to fix it. But Trump’s privatization idea is a non-starter: support for a national health plan based on the principle of Medicare for all, as well as support for government responsibility to provide the poor with assistance for health insurance, is overwhelming! Requiring employers to provide sick and pregnancy leave also gets high marks. Finally, when asked about the Black Lives Matter movement, positive responses generally outweigh negative ones, even among whites.¹

If anything, this election showed that the U.S. has one political party, with two right wings (to paraphrase Gore Vidal.) The Democrats shot themselves in the foot with their arrogance. “America is already great” was their answer to Trump’s chief slogan, and that does not go over with working people who have lost jobs, income and opportunities under the two capitalist parties. It was the Bill Clinton regime that virtually merged the Democratic program with that of the Republicans: neoliberalism, cut-backs to balance the budget, racist mass incarceration, and “abolish welfare as we know it.” The Obama regime’s real “legacy,” despite the fine talk, was one of bailing out the bankers, passing a health-care law that had no way to curb the outrageous drug price increases of Big Pharma, and presiding over declining conditions for working people, including in Black communities. Little wonder that all racial groups and young voters as well, swung to the Republicans in 2016, proof of the bankruptcy of a Democratic elite that ignored essential class issues.²

Clinton and Sanders

The Hillary candidacy terminated even the slightest nod to the working class, and Wall Street robber barons and super rich flocked to her side even more than for Obama. Clinton’s phony rejection of the TPP trade deal, obviously made to appease Bernie Sanders’ supporters after her lengthy record of supporting such deals, just added to the downfall. And the lies: She couldn’t reveal the paid-for speeches to Wall Street—yes she could; she didn’t request the payments for those speeches—yes she did (through her agent.) And the corruption: the pay-to-play deals benefiting the Clintons revealed in her emails, combined with her reliance on unelected super delegates and sabotage to beat Sanders in the primary.

Sanders himself was no help in this, as he had worked in the Democratic Caucus in the Senate for 20 years, and capitulated humiliatingly to Clinton at the convention, whereupon 700 of his supporters jeered him and walked out, some throwing their credentials over the fence. So much for the Sanders “political revolution.” Bottom line: the Democratic Party cannot be reformed any more than can the Republican, and both must be swept away by a revolutionary working class, yet to form a political party.

Blame-the-Russians run around

Amid plaintive cries from liberals and many on the left that the Democratic Party needed to be reformed in order to fight the incoming Trump nightmare, the DNC establishment honed in on blaming the Russians for hacking Hillary’s emails! Aside from the fact that it was the content of the emails (which were not faked or distorted by the way), not the hacking itself, that defeated Hillary, this Russian-baiting conspiracy theory was “fake news” from the beginning. No such hack took place, so it had to have been an insider leak, according to intelligence veterans, who posted their findings on *Consortium News*.³

Assange said the Russians were not the source of the leak; and ex-British ambassador and whistle-blower Craig Murray said it was he who received the emails from a DNC operative who was disgusted “at the corruption of the Clinton Foundation and the tilting of the primary election playing field against Bernie Sanders.”⁴ This information has been virtually ignored by the U.S. media, which is incensed that their candidate lost to the *gropenfuhrer*, a term originally tagged for Arnold Schwarzenegger for his acknowledged history of breast and booty grabbing, and here, referring to Trump. The blame-the-Russians scenario fit in nicely with hawk Hillary’s plan to impose a no-fly zone over Syria, where

Russian warplanes are actively aiding the Assad regime. This might have set up a showdown between Trump and the national security *clique*. This poses a danger of nuclear war, and would have made Clinton perhaps even more dangerous than Trump had she won.

The fake news “fake news” scare

Along with the blame-the-Russians hoax is the “fake news” scare, kicked off by anonymous “experts” given a bullhorn by the *Washington Post* (November 24, 2016), which has spread like wildfire through media and social media, with strong McCarthyite implications. The *Post* reported that a group called PropOrNot had a list of some 200 sites that were dealing in “fake news,” *i.e.*, stories that reflected Russian-planted lies or were otherwise out of line with what mainstream media wants to foist on us.

The mind boggles that, first of all, a supposedly reputable news source would publish such trash from a source who remained anonymous out of fear of...what, incarceration, torture, assassination? No: simply out of fear of being hacked by the Russians! Worse, this unnamed group soon published its list: a tally of web sites it deemed suspicious. These included *Truth-out*, *Truthdig*, *volairnet.org*, *Counterpunch*, *WikiLeaks*, *antiwar.com*, the *Drudge Report*, *nakedcapitalism.com*, *opednews.com* and *consortiumnews.com*, among many others!⁵

With this, the *Washington Post* and its shady PropOrNot character assassins condemn some of the very reporters which have heroically exposed the actual fake news that the very same *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and other “reliable” sources have been pedaling for years, such as the “slam-dunk fact” that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, justifying Bush’s 2003 “shock and awe” invasion, which devastated Iraqi society, created sectarian civil war and caused millions of casualties and victims. Now these

same fake news perps are hammering us that the Russians hacked the election, for which there is no proof!

Investigative journalist Robert Parry, now the editor of *Consortium News*, points to the fact that it was he who managed to break the Oliver North/Iran Contra conspiracy into the mainstream press when he worked for *Newsweek*. Other stories he is currently working on include the CIA’s internal doubts over who really committed the sarin gas attack in Syria on August 21, 2013, the covered-up role of neo-Nazis in the Ukraine putsch of February 2014 that overthrew an elected government, and the mysterious shoot-down of the Malaysian airliner MH-17 over Ukraine; all issues in which there was a U.S. interest.⁶

Voter fraud: going through the looking-glass

What’s behind the made-up saga of Russians having hacked the election—it’s covered up by the official media—is the fact that the election was rigged, just not in the way that the DNC, or Trump alleged. “Voter fraud”—the idea that masses of illegal aliens, or felons, or others are voting “many, many times”—is a fake-news hoax, designed to throw you off the track of how elections are actually stolen. Fraud by voters is a felony, but no one is ever arrested for it because it doesn’t exist.

Starting at the beginning, it should be seen by now that the U.S. is not a democracy, and never has been. At first, it was simple: only property-owning white males could vote. Slaves, poor whites, women, even property-owning Black freedmen (there were a handful) could not vote. Wow, problem solved to keep the elites in power!

But that wasn’t enough: the Congress had to be rigged to give more weight to southern slave-holding states over the more populous northern states. They all had some slaves, but in most southern states, slaves outnumbered whites by big percentages, which

would have meant an imbalance in the number of representatives the slavers could get in Congress. This would have been a deal-breaker in a country whose economy was based on slavery. Hence, the three-fifths rule: slaves could be counted as three-fifths of a person when calculating the number of representatives a state was entitled to have in the House (the Senate was of course also designed to equalize smaller and larger states.) And, lest we forget, the “framers” also invented the Electoral College, the sole purpose of which was to shield the elites from the possibly devastating effects of the popular vote—a bit of nonsense, unknown anywhere else, that we’re still dealing with today.

Flashing forward, we note that Blacks still couldn’t vote (except briefly, during Reconstruction) in southern states for about a century after the Civil War, and women couldn’t vote until the 1920s. That’s a lot of history; but even after the Civil Rights laws and universal suffrage was in place, there was rampant vote rigging through all sorts of mechanisms, such as the infamous “graveyard vote,” and the intimidation of Democratic Party machines such as Tammany Hall in New York, and Mayor Daley’s corrupt regime in Chicago, which is what got JFK elected. While some of this is old news now, gerrymandering, or the rigging of elections by a party in power in a state by using sophisticated redistricting to isolate its opponents and ensure its success at the polls, is, after a century at least, still with us big time.

Nixon’s “treason” and the October surprise

Gerrymandering and early 20th Century election rigging were outrageous, but they pale in comparison to the imperialist crimes that have been committed with the intent of influencing domestic U.S. politics. Certainly the Hearst newspaper campaign for war with Spain in the late 1890s set a prec-

edent, but tricky Dick Nixon may have topped the dung heap with his conspiracy to steal the election of 1968. This fully-verified but little-known plot involved Nixon’s back channel sabotage of on-going negotiations to end the war in Vietnam, which were in progress in Paris toward the end of LBJ’s last term. Johnson hoped to seal a peace treaty before the election, which he hoped would aid Democrat Hubert Humphrey in the up-coming vote.

Nixon’s campaign agents went behind Johnson’s back to convince South Vietnam’s U.S. puppet-president Nguyen van Thieu to torpedo the Paris peace talks by not showing up, on the promise that Nixon could get him a “better deal” in the talks when he was in office. Soon Johnson got wind of this plot, and privately referred to it as “treason.” Yet on the advice of aides, he never went public, because, according to Defense Secretary Clark Clifford, such an exposure would be “inimical to our country’s interests!” The plot worked and Nixon took office, only to radically escalate the bombing to no avail. The eventual peace deal was no different than what was on the table in 1968. Later, Nixon created his notorious team of “plumbers” (who were subsequently caught in the Watergate scandal,) to try to retrieve a missing White House file, which exposed his treason. Nixon’s 1968 plot resulted in about one million more Vietnamese deaths over the four years, as well as almost 21,000 additional U.S. casualties.⁷

The “October Surprise” caper cost no lives, but was just as devious. President Jimmy Carter was trying to get reelected in 1980, while also attempting to free the U.S. embassy hostages in Iran, who were trapped there following the overthrow of the Shah and the ascendance of the mullahs to power. Carter had earlier tried to free the hostages with a military operation that had failed. The reputation of U.S. imperialism was on the line, for both Democrats and Republicans! What to do? Ronald Reagan’s campaign director

William Casey, soon to be CIA Director, organized a clandestine effort to prevent the hostages’ release until the U.S. Election Day, which ensured Reagan’s victory, and sent Carter back to his peanut farm. What’s the take-away? U.S. imperialism and its fake “democracy” are both part of the malicious machinations of the same den of thieves.⁸

“Whites a minority?” Can’t have that

In the wake of the 1960s, Nixon pioneered the Republican “Southern Strategy,” which focused on the takeover of the Southern States from the Dixiecrats, and morphed into a general Republican Party plan to achieve power in state capitols. This in turn has led to tactics by conservatives to deal with the “Browning of America,” *i.e.*, the idea that whites are becoming a minority in what the right wing thinks is their country, damnit! Gerrymandering has now become significant in Republican-controlled states such as Texas and Wisconsin, to name two, and it’s all aimed at suppressing the vote of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and poor people generally.

Gerrymandering is just the oldest of today’s many methods of voter suppression. Republicans managed to engineer a Supreme Court decision in 2013 that effectively eliminated key provisions of the Voting Rights Act: states and counties with a history of racial discrimination no longer needed Department of Justice approval to change local voting rules and practices. This led to a tsunami of restrictive measures, such as burdensome voter ID laws, which discriminate against vast numbers of poor and minorities. And that is just the beginning.

Numerous artifices have been brought into play since 2000 to suppress the minority vote in addition to voter ID laws: purging and “caging” of voter rolls, discounting “spoiled” and provisional ballots, and “flipping” votes using privately-owned electronic

voting machines. The evidence for this, developed by investigative reporters such as Jonathan Simon, Victoria Collier and Greg Palast, among many others, is staring the bourgeois media in the face, yet it is still ignored.⁹

It started in 2000, with the famous “hanging chad” debacle, in which G. Dubya Bush, with the aid of a Republican Supreme Court, stole the election from Gore. Central to this was the purging of the voter rolls of supposed “felons,” most of whom were no such thing. Also involved was the failure to complete the hand recount, which would have shown the intent of the voters whose hanging-chad ballots had been rejected. When the recount was heading toward a Gore victory, Antonin Scalia said it had to be halted because showing that Gore was gaining would “threaten irreparable harm to petitioner Bush, and to the country, by casting a cloud upon what he claims to be the legitimacy of his election!”¹⁰ Never mind irreparable harm to the legitimacy of U.S. elections that was already long gone! Gore’s immediate acceptance of this travesty sealed the deal: both parties are in this together.

Tricks of the trade

“Caging” is another sneaky trick used to eliminate Black and Brown voters. A letter is sent to voters, no forwarding allowed, asking them to verify that they are registered to vote. Most know they are registered, and don’t respond, but failure to respond means you get removed from the rolls without warning: you show up, and you can’t vote! Likely you get a provisional ballot, but these are usually not counted. Then there is the “Interstate Crosscheck List,” which is distributed by a Koch Brothers-funded program to states to allegedly eliminate thousands who have voted twice in separate states. Yet the common names of those on the list mostly don’t match exactly, and when they do, they’re still two different people! There is no notice given to those so

arbitrarily removed from the rolls. Then there is the “spoiled ballot” factor, in which some inept machine rejects a ballot because of a stray mark or a bubble not filled in. The result of all this is that, for instance, 75,355 ballots were never counted in Michigan. These were mostly from the most populous and mostly Black cities of Flint and Detroit.

In all the elections since 2000, there has been a distinct “red shift” in the final vote count, *i.e.*, a significant percentage of votes allegedly cast for the GOP candidates that were not there in the exit polls. In Obama’s election and reelection, his totals, though declining, were enough to cancel out the red shift. This discrepancy however, which is always to the right, is statistically impossible without tampering. (Exit polls are accurate. The U.S. uses them to judge other countries’ elections, when they’re not rigging those elections themselves, of course.)

A stymied recount

The recount effort initiated by Jill Stein of the Green Party confirmed that these 75,000 were never counted, but in all three states she contested, the recount was subverted by establishment push-back. And in Michigan, this included the Democrats. While Clinton grudgingly joined the recount effort, she refused to pursue it at a critical point: when Stein was denied legal “standing” in the recount, since she could not have won from the result, Clinton, who could have won, and was an alleged ally in the recount effort, was nowhere to be found.

The recount effort was doomed by Clinton’s non-participation, and by official state obstruction in all three states that were targeted (Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan.) In a strange way, that’s a good thing, because it shows that the system circled its wagons to protect its secrets, which are many. But Stein’s recount effort could never have exposed everything it need-

ed to in the first place, due to the fact that electronic voting machines are privately owned, and can be privately rigged (votes can be “flipped” in off-site locations) with no public oversight possible in most cases. Stein’s attempt at a recount, which she said would probably not change the result, but needed to be done to ensure “confidence” in the system, could easily have resulted in legitimizing the system, had it not been for the massive official obstruction.

If the election had really been free, fair and honest—a utopian dream if there ever was one—Clinton would possibly have won. But that would not have been any sort of “victory,” nor would it have changed the fact that the liberal establishment is bankrupt. Democrats have rigged U.S. elections just as much as Republicans over the years, and both parties in power have rigged, subverted and tampered with elections in neo-colonial countries for more than a century, not to mention overthrowing democratically elected governments everywhere.

What the imperialists do abroad

The recent elections in Haiti were travesties rigged by the U.S. and its agents, the only difference being greater brazenness—and much bigger protests—in Haiti than here. In Cité Soleil, a huge impoverished neighborhood of Port-au-Prince which has long been overwhelmingly supportive of the Fanmi Lavalas movement of Jean Bertrand Aristide, the populist priest who was twice elected president only to be overthrown and banned from running again, hundreds of would-be voters frantically searched for their names on registration lists outside polling stations to no avail. Their names had been “hacked” out of existence Haitian style. Ballots are routinely found dumped in garbage bins in Haiti. In one large Cité Soleil precinct, only 59 votes were recorded, all for the handpicked successor of the current pro-U.S. president!

The chief U.S. agent is Guy Phillippe, an ex-military drug-runner who is wanted by the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration,) but protected as an asset by the CIA, and so never gets arrested despite openly running for office. He has now “won” a seat in the Senate in this rigged election.¹¹ What the imperialists will do abroad, they will do (and are doing) here.

The 2016 U.S. elections are emblematic of the long, slow and agonizing decline of U.S. imperialism. The liberals and most of the left don’t have a clue as to what is really going on. Most want to reform the Democratic Party, and/or defend U.S. “democracy” by somehow reclaiming its legitimacy. Certainly we should expose election fraud by voter suppression, but we must understand what is the real nature of this imperialist republic. That it is a capitalist and imperialist power is superficially clear to many, but how does it really work? It’s a bourgeois democracy, right? We do have elections and rights, correct?

What is bourgeois democracy?

Yes this is a bourgeois democracy, but the point that is so often missed is that it is a “democracy” only for the ruling class itself. Voting by the masses is controlled by so many mechanisms that even a landslide for a “peoples choice” can produce only an intelligent fraud like Obama. The ruling elite—the bourgeoisie—controls everything; but even in their hallowed halls there is not the kind of “democracy” to which we are accustomed to imagine. There are no fairly-decided democratic decisions among them. And the ruling class is not a united conspiracy of rule; it doesn’t even work like that under fascism (which this is not.) The wielders of power are a constantly boiling, frothing, fuming pot of conflicting factions, *cliques* and conspiracies, united against the working classes and their imperialist rivals, but desperately struggling for power among themselves. Just as the

big corporations constantly compete with each other, always trying to dominate and monopolize, so the ruling class as a whole is just a bunch warring *cliques*. Think all the world’s mafias, all competing for turf, and all on billionaire-enhanced steroids.

Only with this understanding can we truly know how the 2016 U.S. election really worked. Why did Trump win, when most if not all of the big ruling-class institutions were for Clinton? Of course voter disgust with the corrupt establishment was a factor. But ruling-class actors were playing both sides, and one right-wing faction was playing the racist rig-the-election card: the Koch brothers and their allies in the Republican right, some of whom have gobbled up and privatized the electronic voting machine market, came up with the winning hand this time! Note that the other side quickly fell in line with the winners: the stock market dipped on Trump’s win for two days, and then rebounded big time; and the Republican establishment is now helping Trump construct a reactionary billionaire’s cabinet like no other. There are some left-outs. But mostly, they’re all in the same card game, they all want to grease the palm of the winner, and they all want their hand in for the next round!

Just as there is an inevitable decline in the rate of profit—which will only get worse with the looming trend of robot-driven production—there is a concomitant decline of this whole boiling cesspool of imperialism that is the U.S. It can only get worse, except for one thing: working people fighting for their own liberation from all this endless rot.

Working people had a role to play in this election, as in the class struggle as a whole; but they were missing in action as a class force, as they have been for decades. Many working people and lower middle class elements swung the vote away from the two party establish-

ments to Trump, but did they put forward their own interests? Obviously not. The much talked-about opposition to the incoming Trump regime needs to focus on construction of a revolutionary, working-class party, one which is committed to fighting for the rights of all working people, including immigrants, people of color, women and gays; and to ripping the power out of the hands of the capitalist ruling class. Workers must rule!

1 See pollingreports.com, which reports on and summarizes dozens of national opinion polls.

2 “The Myth of the Reactionary White Working Class,” www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/11/12/pers-mi2.html

3 “U.S. Intel Vets Dispute Russia Hacking Claims,” December 12, 2016, www.consortium-news.com. This report makes it clear that the emails had to have been leaked, not hacked.

4 www.dailymail.co.uk/news

5 Glenn Greenwald, “Washington Post Disgracefully Promotes a McCarthyite Blacklist...” theintercept.com.

6 Robert Parry, “Washington Post’s ‘Fake News’ Guilt” 27 November 2016, www.consortiumnews.com.

7 see “LBJ’s ‘X’ File on Nixon’s ‘Treason,’” for the complete story, including quotes from taped White House recordings, at consortium-news.com.

8 See “The Modern History of ‘Rigged’ US Elections,” consortiumnews.com, for a good summary of Nixon’s treason and the “October Surprise.”

9 See Jonathan D. Simon, *Code Red, Computerized Election Theft and the New American Century*, 2016, www.electiondefensealliance.org; Victoria Collier, “How To Rig an Election,” *Harpers’s Magazine*, November 2012; Victoria Collier, “The ‘Shocking’ Truth About Election Rigging in the United States,” *Truth-out*, September 5, 2016; and Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy, A Tale of Billionaires and Ballot Bandits*, 2016 edition. And see Greg Palast’s movie of the same name. gregpalast.com.

10 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bush_v._Gore

11 See www.haitisolidarity.net, and this edition of *Flashpoints*, focusing on the Haitian elections: www.https://kpfj.org/episode/flashpoints-december-20-2016/

Ghost Ship is Our Triangle Fire

BY ALEXANDER BILLET AND ADAM TURL

America hates its artists. America hates its young working-class people.

Thirty-six people are dead. They are victims of an art and music economy that doesn't work for the majority of artists and musicians. They are dead because art has become financialized. They are dead because gentrification is taking away our right to the city—and pushing artists and young workers to the margins—especially (but not only) artists of color. And because of gentrification the urban life-rafts for gender non-conforming and queer young people are shrinking. You can't stay in the small towns, but you can't afford San Francisco, Oakland, Seattle and Portland.

Real estate developers want to take advantage of this tragedy for their own ends. Instead of making these “underground” spaces safe for the people who live there—they will take them away and make expensive condos and lofts. And local government, while pretending to care about artists and young people, will actively help displace them.

On March 25, 1911, 146 garment workers, mostly women, mostly Jewish and Italian, mostly immigrants, died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City. The clothing factory—full of cloth particles in the air and scraps on the floor—caught fire quickly. The exits were locked to prevent the workers from taking unauthorized breaks—to squeeze every last cent from their labor. In the aftermath, workers organized the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. They fought back.

The Ghost Ship is our Triangle Fire. At least it should be.

Art in a schizoid society

“We live in a schizoid society,” Danielle Thys writes in an article titled “America Has Abandoned Its Artists,” “that denigrates process and

deifies product... We bleed money for the goods creative individuals produce once they're established. But we do next to nothing—and I mean seriously...nothing—to support those individuals in the interim. No education, no training, no grants, no subsidies, no rental assistance, no significant tax breaks, no safe space to work or live or perform. Yes, there are struggling, anemic programs here or there. But there is ostensibly no safety net and the cuts keep coming to the thin thread that masquerades as one.”

Even *USA Today* acknowledged the problem:

“[T]he second tech boom in the past six years prompted warehouse spaces and lofts in San Francisco's formerly industrial areas—once home to artists—to rapidly give way to high-end condos and live-work spaces that only start-ups with venture capital funding can afford.”

This pattern is repeated in city after city. As the urban core is gentrified, working-class people, people of color and artists (groups that overlap significantly), are being displaced.

While most economically developed countries provide more substantial support to the arts (although gentrification and abuse of artists occurs everywhere) there is almost no public support for the arts in the United States.

As Thys observes, Germany spends \$20 per taxpayer in annual art funding compared to forty-three cents in the U.S. The British government spends \$728 million annually on museums, “nearly five times the entire \$146 million budget of the U.S. National Endowment of the Arts.” Thys continues:

“The budget of the French Ministry of Culture is more than \$10 Billion—yes—with a ‘B’. Northern Ireland, with its population of less

than two million people, awards over \$21 million annually for arts, literature and theatre projects. In South Korea, the Culture Ministry committed over \$50 Billion (!) toward the development (and often training and housing) of Korean musicians, performers and artists with a goal of proudly promoting Korean arts and culture abroad. That amount represents a lowball of the initial investment South Korea made in the Korean Wave. But their budget for 2017 is around \$7 Billion, just behind France.

“Mexican artists can pay their taxes with artwork in an ‘art for amnesty’ type of exchange. The Mexican government then displays the work in museums and government offices. Among other sizable benefits for artists, Finland allocates \$45 million toward the arts for its 5.3 million citizens. We are bested by Uzbekistan and the Balkans.”

There is no (human) reason for artists to be pushed to the edge. In 2014 the art market was worth about \$66 billion globally. But in the U.S. only about 5,000 artists were able to make a living through their art. The global art market shrank by about seven percent in 2016—but the blue chip artworks at auction continued to make record sales—meaning the decline was in large part in compensation to living working artists.

In the music industry, the past year has seen revenue bounce back to record levels after years of slump. The reason? Primarily the dominance of streaming services, whose profits have overtaken physical record sales for the first time. Not by coincidence, most of these services pay musicians mere pennies each time their song is played. A similar dynamic plays out in the other American culture industries. From film to theater to publishing. Billions made, scraps doled out.

Young workers—and young artists are mostly also young workers—face little social support and dimming economic prospects. There is precariousness across the post-industrial world—shorter job tenure, lower wages, fewer unions, higher unemployment, and worsening racism—but the lack of free education and a genuine welfare system in the U.S. makes things particularly bleak. While college education is nearly free or subsidized in much of Europe, it shackles U.S. students in decades-long indentured servitude.

An unmeasured number of artists, filmmakers, musicians, writers and performers—particularly those with an experimental framework or “minority” identity—find themselves either shut out of the mainstream of their industries or have, understandably, turned their back on its cutthroat competition and aesthetic formulae. Without social support for artists or education—with skyrocketing rents and stagnant incomes, burgeoning bigotry against people of color, trans, queer and gender-non-conforming people, and rising xenophobia against immigrants—underground spaces like the Ghost Ship are a life-raft, however insufficient and potentially dangerous, for an apparently despised generation.

In between the big galleries and the artists, the big music labels and musicians, are a host of middlemen and gallerists. Many are well-intentioned art lovers who want to see artists and musicians succeed. But many are also hustlers and parasites. According to *Autostraddle* the “master tenant” of the Ghost Ship was one of these latter. It is possible, of course, that the mainstream media is exaggerating some of these details in order to create a villain seemingly removed from the overall structural problems responsible for this tragedy. Some have rallied around the master tenant/commune leader of the Ghost Ship.

Stealing the cities from us

The overarching problem, however, is the corporate theft of the Bay Area—

the gentrification of San Francisco and now Oakland. They are taking away our right to the city.

As *Rolling Stone* explains in “Victims of Gentrification:” “Residents of these ‘live-work’ artistic communes often live in fear of losing these spaces, further keeping them from reporting unsafe living conditions to the city which could potentially shut down the space if not up to code.”

Our editors have a long history with DIY art and music spaces. We can attest to the veracity of *Rolling Stone’s* assertion.

Commentators and officials rushed to blame “ravers’ and ‘event-goers’” supposed reckless behavior. They have traded in stereotypes about irresponsible and immature outsiders too hopped up on drugs to apply for a permit. Oakland artists, DJs and activists have been quick to step up in the alternative and mainstream media, explaining in detail why the Bay Area’s housing crisis is to blame. Performance venues and galleries that have in the past been able to stay up to code, to provide a physically safe space, are being priced out, pushing creatives to marginal fringe spaces. In recent days, a coalition of Bay Area artists have come together to insist that governments find a sustainable solution for the arts community—one that doesn’t include callous eviction notices.

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaff was booed and jeered at a vigil for the Ghost Ship. Rightfully so. People resent the Mayor for two major reasons—her relationship to gentrification and the assumption that this fire would be used as a pretext to evict more artists and young people. Her antagonized relationship to social struggles like Black Lives Matter contributed to this (correct) distrust.

“When people hear ‘safety’ coming out of her mouth, they interpret it as cracking down on these warehouse spaces, which is really what people

want to avoid,” [Marke] Bieschke told *BuzzFeed News*. “I think ‘safety’ is going to quickly become a buzzword for evicting and cracking down on these marginalized communities.”

Cynthia, who asked to only be identified by her first name, added that community members were frustrated by Schaff’s focus on the fact that Ghost Ship was zoned as a warehouse, not as a live/work space, rather than on finding ways to “use Oakland’s resources to help creative spaces get up to code and help protect people’s lives.”

Since the vigil Shaff has promised to marshal \$1.7 million to “grant affordable spaces for the city’s arts organizations.” There are few reasons to believe this promise is sincere. First, the funds are all private. No city funds are being allocated. Second, the sum is, in actuality, very small. And much of it could be eaten up in administrative costs for established art organizations with few direct ties to the underground milieu.

This small allocation will not stem the tide of Bay Area gentrification. The fire is already being used a pretext for evictions—and not just in Oakland. Already, police in Denver have used the Ghost Ship fire as a pretext to shut down indie venue Rhinocerosopolis and its sister space the Glob. Both spaces were previously up to code, but were nonetheless deemed unsafe by city fire officials after a surprise inspection.

Neoliberal city-planners and real estate developers are trying to implement a European urban model—concentrating wealth in the city center and pushing working-class and poor people to the periphery. Nowhere has this model gone further than in Paris. In the run-down, poverty-stricken but centrally located Marais, entire streets were evicted in the 1960s and 1970s. “The last thing that would have occurred to those with the power to do something about it,” Luc Sante wrote, “would have been to repair the houses for the benefit of those who lived in them.”

The art of working class and poor people is used to add aesthetic value to a neighborhood, to burnish it as “up and coming,” “unique” or “trendy,” then leverage out these very artists. What is left is an echo of the working-class, ethnic and artistic value that made a neighborhood beautiful and interesting. But it is gutted and emptied of its soul. Not unlike what became of Marais: “retaining the facades of the buildings along a street while gutting their interiors, presumably salvaging any Louis XVI mantel-pieces that might come along.”

They steal everything from us. Winning it back will require real, substantive struggle and victories for artists, working-class people, poor people, queer and trans folk, people of color. It will require a fighting Left that, despite some signs of life, is sorely lacking right now. If this is our Triangle Fire, then artists stand everything to gain from rallying round such a project. The same way their shirtwaist counterparts did in 1911.

DIY Spaces and Artists, Queers, Weirdos + Punks

Any among us who have tried their hand at music, art, or literature can likely see a bit of ourselves in some of those who died on the night of the fire. Many of them created stunning work that resonated far beyond the Bay Area.

Electro-punk artist Joey Casio, Cash Askew from the dream-pop group Them Are Us Too, trans poet and social justice activist Em B, filmmaker Alex Ghassan, DJ and recording artist Cherushii, visual artist Jonathan Bernbaum, UC Berkeley graduate David Cline, sound engineer Barrett Clark, musician and producer Billy Dixon, artist and illustrator David McCarty, art school student Draven McGill, doctoral candidate Jennifer Mendiola, industrial techno artist Nex Iugulo, MIT graduate Nicholas Walrath, Harvard graduate Peter Wadsworth, underground rap scene booker Alex Vega, nail artist Jennifer

Kiyomi Tanouye, Benjamin Runnels and Denalda Nicole Renae of Introflirt, jewelry designer and stylist Hanna Ruax, musicians Wolfgang Renner and his partner Michele Sylvan, UC Berkeley student Vanessa Plotkin, queer artist and musician Feral Pines, UC Berkeley student Jennifer Morris, university arts organization member Griffin Madden, former indie label intern Edmond Lapine, arts community member Donna Kellogg, professional photographer Amanda Kershaw, zine artist Ara

Germany spends \$20 per taxpayer in annual art funding compared to forty-three cents in the U.S. The British government spends \$728 million annually on museums, “nearly five times the entire \$146 million budget of the U.S. National Endowment of the Arts.

Jo, Ghost of Lightning musician Travis Hough, teacher Sara Hoda, San Francisco State University student Michela Gregory, musician Nick Gomez-Hall, DJ Johnny Igaz (who was performing when the fire started), show organizer Micah Danemayer.

These are all people who found identity and community in their art, which is to say nothing of what they contributed as teachers, students, mothers, fathers, friends.

The archetype of the artist as “out-cast” is very easy to romanticize, but it doesn’t come out of the ether. Any

world of profound inequality is bound to produce any number of expressions seeking to mediate it, to find like-thinkers and kindred in society’s liminal spaces. Art in the midst of exploitation is bound to traverse this alienation, and cross over with the fault-lines of oppression.

As *Autostraddle* noted, many of the victims of the Ghost Ship fire were queer, trans, people of color. They quote Gabe Meline (“It Could Have Been Any One Of Us,” *kqed.org*)

“...for many of us, these spaces are what have kept us alive. In a world that demands its inhabitants to be a certain way, think a certain way, or live a certain way, we gravitate to the spaces that say: Welcome. Be yourself. For the tormented queer, the bullied punk, the beaten trans, the spat-upon white trash, the disenfranchised immigrants and young people of color, these spaces are a haven of understanding in a world that doesn’t understand—or can’t, or doesn’t seem to want to try...”

If the Ghost Ship fire is an example of neoliberalism’s not-so-benign neglect exploding in profound violence, then the lack of an alternative to it has also produced a far more deliberate, sinister manifestation. Donald Trump aims to shred what little social welfare remains—while whipping up racism and bigotry against dozens of groups. Even worse, he has emboldened the neo-fascist “alt-right” minority who were his most loyal supporters.

Even in the case of this tragedy some of these “people” have taken aim at us. Nazis on *4chan* have posited the notion of gathering names and information on DIY spaces in Oakland and shutting them down:

“These places are open hotbeds of liberal radicalism and degeneracy and now YOU can stop them by reporting all such places you may be or may become aware of to the authorities, specifically the local fire marshel [sic].

“Watch them and follow them to their hives. Infiltrate social circles, go to parties/events, record evidence, and report it. We’ve got them on the run but now we must crush their nests before they can regroup!”

“MAGA [Make America Great Again] my brothers and happy hunting!”

It’s an undeniably terrible note to end on. But it highlights the jagged edges of American life that are colliding right now—with very little safety net to catch those who fall—and the position of artists in the midst of it all. There is no negotiating with those who have drawn targets on our backs. Likewise, there is no negotiating with a system that wants to bury our intellectual and creative selves under high rents, low wages, and vigilante terror.

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—Red Wedge Magazine, December 12, 2016

<http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/online-issue/ghostship>

Class

What we talk about when we talk about class

BY MICHAEL SCHWALBE

In the course I teach on social class in America, I show students how capitalism generates inequalities in wealth, status, and power. What I offer is not a moral critique of capitalism but rather an empirically grounded analysis of how it works, at a nuts-and-bolts level, to create and maintain a disproportionate flow of material and symbolic resources to the capitalist class. That capitalism does this is, as Noam Chomsky might say, uncontroversial. Or, as a student double-majoring in sociology and business once said to me, “You talk about a lot of the same things my business professors do, but you sure talk about them differently.”

Once my students understand how capitalism works and the full range of consequences it produces, their moral intuition tells them what’s wrong with this form of economy. They recognize the unfairness of a system premised on the exploitation of labor; a system that allows wealth to accumulate to an unlimited degree and thus belie claims to provide equal opportunity; a system that wastes vast human potential; a system that undermines democracy by concentrating power in the hands of a relative few. I make the point that sociological analysis can’t tell us what’s right or wrong, but it can inform our moral judgments by helping us see how our social practices affirm or betray our best values.

The irony that hangs over our deliberations is that even as we pursue a critical analysis of capitalism—an analysis that exposes its inhumanity and thus at least suggests the desirability of change—the reality is that students aren’t in college to learn how to overthrow an exploitive and oppressive system. In fact, what they are seeking, most of them, is a comfortable place in that system. This is no fault of theirs; they are

economically compelled to seek credentials and skills that will help them avoid the worst that capitalism dishes out and, if possible, benefit from what it dishes out to less fortunate others. Under other historical conditions, higher education might serve different purposes.

Professors are no less trapped; we have simply found our comfortable place in the system years ahead of the students who are still seeking theirs. It seems to me that our mutual entrapment, combined with the seeming intractability of capitalism, are what largely account for the turn away from political economy and toward cultural matters—the turn that has resulted in many Left professors, mostly in the social sciences and humanities, being seen as mere champions of political correctness rather than as serious critical intellectuals with something useful to say about how capitalist society works and how it might be transformed.

At the classroom level, this turn toward the cultural is reflected in efforts to teach students to appreciate diversity, examine their privileges, and reckon with the unconscious racism and sexism embedded in their everyday behavior. To be clear, I think these are good things to do; no destructive inequalities should be given a pass. The problem is that, as useful as these strategies might be for making our students more sensitive and socially aware, they let the class system off the hook. It thus comes to seem that inclusion and diversity within a capitalist framework are the only sensible goals to aim for.

By focusing so much on the cultural, we also end up abetting what Adolph Reed has called an identitarian politics of proportional inclusion. All will be well, we lead our students to believe, if members of historically excluded groups are allowed to enter, in propor-

tion to their numbers in society, the ranks of bosses, administrators, generals, and capitalists. This sort of cosmetic change is unthreatening to those safely ensconced in the system, and it naturally appeals to those trying to find a place nearer to the top than the bottom. Inclusion, yes. Upward mobility, yes. Transformation? Only *après moi*, maybe.

A now-retired colleague of Marxist persuasion once remarked on what he saw as a telling omission on the part of many academics who study inequality. He observed that while everyone agrees that racism and sexism are wrong and should be eradicated, few people make the same argument about class. “Why is it imperative to oppose racism and sexism,” he asked, “and not class?” Between us, it was mostly a rhetorical question. We knew that the answer had to do with academics’ class privilege and need to embrace an ideology of meritocracy to justify that privilege. To call class into question would be to question not just a system of inequality but our own deservingness.

While social scientists certainly haven’t ignored class, the attention we’ve paid to it usually takes one of two forms: using class as a variable to predict the attitudes or behaviors of individuals; or studying the lives of people in certain class categories (e.g., ethnographic studies of working-class communities). Such studies can be useful for showing how people experience and are affected by their class locations. What’s typically missing, however, is analysis of how the class system works—how it is used by those who control the means of production and administration—to generate and maintain the inequalities that shape people’s lives.

Part of the problem is that some of the conceptual language useful for unpacking these matters has been stigmatized. The language exists but using it carries a high risk of being dismissed

as an ideologue. To speak of a growing gap between productivity and wages over the last thirty years is acceptable. To speak of wage stagnation as a partial result of declining union membership is okay. To speak of ever more wealth accruing to the richest one percent is now within respectable bounds. But to speak of an increasing rate of expropriation enabled by capitalist victories in the class struggle is to invite trouble. Or invisibility.

Focusing solely on diversity, inclusion, privilege, and mobility means having little to contribute when it comes to challenging capitalist power, advancing working-class interests, or transforming capitalism as a whole.

This is not just a matter of how class is talked about in academic circles. How we study, talk about, and write about class has wider consequences. Focusing solely on diversity, inclusion, privilege, and mobility means having little to contribute when it comes to challenging capitalist power, advancing working-class interests, or transforming capitalism as a whole. It means, in effect, accepting a soft ring-side seat.

If we hope to say anything useful about how to transcend capitalism, we have to examine the system itself—the rules of the game, the legal and political tactics, the ideological manipulation, the mechanisms of exploitation, the coordinated strategies of domination—not just its consequences for

values, personal behaviors, and mobility prospects. We also need to take more seriously the implications of intersectionality.

Jargon though it might seem, “intersectionality” has two useful meanings. It can refer to the fact that we’re all caught in multiple systems of inequality at once. Our life chances and daily experiences are the results not just of class position but also, simultaneously, of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability status. Intersectionality can also refer to how systems that create and perpetuate inequality—capitalism, racism, and sexism—mutually reinforce each other. It’s this latter sense of intersectionality, the structural sense, that has gotten lost in the cultural turn.

The failure to think structurally is evident in the term “classism,” which is meant to parallel “racism” and “sexism.” But whereas we grasp racism and sexism as broad systems of discriminatory practices and justifying beliefs, “classism” typically refers to what we used to call elitism or snobbery. A true parallel term would refer not to matters of attitude but to organized practices of economic exploitation and to the ideologies that justify such practices. It is this understanding of what class entails that also has gotten lost. Taking intersectionality seriously and recognizing that class is not merely elitism but rather a system of economic exploitation, has, as my erstwhile Marxist colleague suggested, a powerful implication: class, no less than racism and sexism, should be abolished—even by the moral standards of liberalism.

Cultural critique remains necessary. People live in a culture no less than in an economy. And if the truth is the whole, then both culture and social organization must be analyzed to arrive at a full picture of how any society works. But at this historical juncture it seems that our own frustrations and privileges have led us—academics who

would presume to speak about class, about inequality, about change—to narrow our analytic view to the cultural and attitudinal. Ironically, by focusing on what has seemed most amenable to change we have perhaps impeded it.

Making the social machinery of capitalism the target of analysis exposes racism and sexism as tools of the capitalist class. Racism and sexism divide and weaken the working class and enable the super-exploitation of subgroups of workers. And by making these things possible, racism and sexism aid the accumulation of wealth that bolsters capitalist power. So if we are serious about eradicating racism and sexism and dismantling privilege, we must recognize that this can't be done within a capitalist framework. By implication, a well-meaning liberalism that takes its own moral commitments seriously must oppose capitalism, or collapse under the weight of hypocrisy. Honest intersectional thinking, in other words, has to become radical thinking if it is not to betray itself and its would-be beneficiaries.

Michael Schwalbe is a professor of sociology at North Carolina State University.

—Counter Punch, December 7, 2016

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/12/07/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-class/>



Trump's Deadly Pick

Trump's top Commerce Secretary pick is a billionaire who owned coal mine where 12 miners were killed

BY REYNARD LOKI

On the campaign trail, President-elect Donald Trump made a big promise to coal miners, many of whom have lost their jobs as the industry collapses. "We're going to get those miners back to work," he said during his victory speech in May after securing the GOP presidential nomination. "Let me tell you, the miners in West Virginia and Pennsylvania... they're going to start to work again. Believe me. You're going to be proud again to be miners." Trump went on to win the nation's top four coal-producing states: Wyoming, West Virginia, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. (Clinton won the fifth, Illinois.)

But Trump's commitment to out-of-work miners appears to have faltered, as his top pick for Commerce Secretary is Wilbur Ross Jr., a New York billionaire who owned the now-defunct Sago mine in West Virginia where 12 miners were killed in an explosion in 2006. The blast and ensuing collapse trapped 13 miners for almost two days. Only one survived. At the time, it was the deadliest mining disaster the Mountain State had experienced in nearly four decades. (It was eclipsed in 2010, when an explosion at Upper Big Branch Mine, also in West Virginia, killed 29 miners.)

In 2004, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, a division of the Labor Department, slapped Sago with 140 violations. Apparently, those citations didn't force Ross to improve his mine's safety: In 2005, MSHA cited the mine with even more violations, 208 total. Of those, 96 were considered "significant" or "serious and substantial." Barely into the following year, on January 2, 2006, the deadly blast occurred.

Following the disaster, MSHA released a statement, saying:

"MSHA became concerned that the Sago Mine's safety performance record was not as good as it should be. Mining operations at the Sago Mine more than doubled between 2004 and 2005, and the injury rate was significantly above the national average. This prompted MSHA to dramatically increase by 84 percent its on-site inspection and enforcement presence. ... several [citations] involved significant violations that were the result of high negligence."

Still, the agency said none of the 2005 health and safety violations "involved an immediate risk of injury that would have warranted [an] imminent danger order," noting that "the operator has worked to correct all health and safety problems in accordance with the requirements of the Mine Act."

Federal investigators speculated that a lightning strike may have caused the methane-fueled explosion. The *Charleston Gazette* reported that MSHA "concluded that stronger seals, proper methane monitoring and the removal of a pump cable from the sealed area where the explosion occurred could have prevented the disaster." In 2011, nearly six years after the accident, the last wrongful death suits were finally settled.

Man behind the mine

Ross is chairman and CEO of WL Ross & Co., a private equity firm. He made his fortune restructuring distressed companies across a variety of industries, including telecommunications, textiles, steel and coal. He also served as Rudy Giuliani's privatization adviser when Giuliani was the mayor of New York. (The former mayor was one of Trump's top picks for Secretary of State.)

In April 2005, Ross purchased Anker Coal, a Netherlands-based coal-mining firm founded in 1992. But his interest in the company went back many years. According to court records and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings, he had been slowly buying up shares in the company since 1999, eventually controlling the firm since at least early 2001—and its troubled Sago mine, located around 100 miles east of Charleston.

Ross claimed he wasn't involved in Sago's day-to-day operations management, but later admitted he knew about the violations, and simply dismissed them. The *New York Post* reported that former WL Ross & Co. executives put the blame squarely at their ex-boss's feet, noting he "had been intimately involved with the company that owned the West Virginia mine where 12 miners perished—and he knew all about its safety problems."

GOP: No more corporate accountability

The year before the Sago tragedy, Representative Major Owens (D-NY) introduced the Wrongful Death Accountability Act, which sought to upgrade the penalty for corporate manslaughter from a mere misde-

meanor to a felony offense, and doubling the maximum prison time, from six months to a year, for lying to Occupational Safety and Health Administration safety inspectors.

In his House floor speech urging support for his bill, Representative Owens said, "the federal government is itself guilty of gross negligence in efforts to deter corporate manslaughter." Predictably, the bill was squashed by Republicans on a party-line vote. A little over a decade later, government negligence may have a new poster boy.

In 2005, the Sago fines amounted to about \$96,000, essentially a slap on the wrist for maintaining what was essentially a death trap. "Such 'enforcement' has a deterrent effect akin to punishing drunk driving with fines of a few nickels," remarked Jeff Milchen, director of *ReclaimDemocracy.org*, a few days after the disaster.

Connecting negligence with profit, Milchen argued that preventing future tragedies like Sago "involves changing the cost-benefit analysis made by corporate executives in workplace safety decisions." Although MSHA kept firing off citations and fines, "the average fine levied in 2005—about \$150—equals a few seconds of income," wrote Milchen, noting that the mine's managers "simply wrote them off as a cost of doing business on the cheap."

Irony, tragedy

But perhaps no amount of money can erase guilty feelings. "For the rest of my life, the memory of those who died at Sago will haunt me," said Ross. "That will never go away. I know that the families will wonder whether there wasn't something more I could have done to make sure their loved ones would still be alive."

Tragically, there was.

On the campaign trail, Trump described himself as the "last shot for the miners," saying he would be "an unbelievable positive." But the only thing that is unbelievable about Trump's position on coal mining is that he may put a negligent CEO in charge of the federal department whose mission is, in part, improving the living standards of Americans through "sustainable development." Evidently, Trump is more interested in having an irresponsible fellow billionaire setting the nation's industrial standards than the welfare of out-of-work coal miners he promised to help—and who helped put him into the Oval Office.

As Commerce chief, Ross would be in charge of a wide array of disparate federal agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Patent and Trademark Office, and the Minority Business Development Agency. In what would be an ironic twist, the former mining boss would also be responsible for the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the agency that conducted the official post-9/11 investigation into the World Trade Center building collapse.

Trump—who Purdue history professor Louis René Beres castigated for taking "an evident pride in his deep historical illiteracy"—likely doesn't know that in 1825, his predecessor Thomas Jefferson feared a "government of an aristocracy... moneyed in corporations...ruling over the plundered ploughman and beggared yeomanry." Nearly two centuries later, Jefferson's fear is coming true.

—*Alternet*, November 17, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/environment/trumps-top-commerce-secretary-pick-billionaire-who-owned-coal-mine-where-12-miners-were>



The Trump Election

A letter to my students

By BOB MANDEL

This was written for immigrant students in my class as their shock and fear pervaded the classroom in the day after the election and the rest of the teaching week... and a week later, it led to an open, careful, fruitful and information-filled discussion on how the students feel and what they think they can and should do. The process is continuing. —Bob Mandel, teacher.

Yes, there are grounds for fear. Close among Trump's top advisors and a would-be cabinet member is the vicious law-and-order man Rudy Giuliani, notorious for authorizing the police to "stop and frisk" every young person of color in New York City. There is the danger of immigration raids and deportations even greater than those done by Obama who deported more people than any president in U.S. history plus Trump's hate-laced attacks on Muslims. But just ten years ago, the immigrant community, primarily Latino, showed that it has the means to defend itself, not just with words, but actions.

On May 1, 2006, millions of immigrants staged a one-day stay-away strike, refusing to work, boycotting American companies, and refusing to buy any products that day. It was called *El Gran Paro Estadounidense*, the Great American Strike. The strike demanded the right to stay in the country and continue to work. The strike was so powerful that it defeated a proposed federal law, HR 4437, which would have made living in the U.S. without papers a felony, and jailed or fined those who protected undocumented workers or employed them. In California and some other states, the strength of the strike led to issuing drivers licenses to undocumented workers.

On a smaller but still important note, voters in Arizona just kicked the

notorious racist anti-immigrant Sheriff Joe Arapaio out of office. And many Sanctuary cities have announced they will continue to provide sanctuary against ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids.

Trump's election can be understood as a mix of desperation on the part of millions who lost their jobs and homes in the Great Recession intersecting a long violent history of racism in the United States. Some of these people had first voted for Sanders so they are not in lockstep with Trump. But the historical use of racism to divide and conquer makes Trump's election truly dangerous.

Some history of racism and exploitation in America

The U.S. was built on the genocide of the indigenous people and on the enslavement of Africans. Millions of poor people from England, whose parents and ancestors had themselves been serfs for a thousand years—tied to the land in virtual slavery—upon coming to America saw the chance to get land for themselves and they didn't care who they displaced and killed to get it. The genocide was given a religious cover because the Native Americans weren't Christian.

And the rich took huge swaths of land to plant tobacco and later cotton, enslaving and importing tens-of-millions of Africans to work the land. Slavery accumulated enor-

mous wealth for the United States, allowing capitalism to expand and build the modern society we know, and establish global domination. At the root of slavery was the lashing, beating, raping and working-to-death of Blacks on a daily basis and the establishment of a legal system, police force and culture designed to ensure Black subordination through violence, jails, denial of education and treatment as less-than-human.

Very similar treatment was extended to Mexicans after the Mexican-American War of 1846-8. U.S. forces started this war to expand slavery into Texas, and after invading and capturing Mexico City, the U.S. took control of California and the entire Southwest.

After Chinese provided the main labor to build the first Transcontinental Railroad across the U.S., the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 and not repealed until 1943. No Chinese women were allowed into the country in the hopes that all the men who built the railroads and worked in the gold



fields would go home to find companions. Chinese laundries were burned and Chinese assaulted and killed by whites made desperate by the capitalist depression of 1873-96 and finding it easier to lynch Chinese than attack the bosses who had laid them off.

From 1941-45 during World War II, all Japanese in the U.S. were rounded up and put in concentration camps. Their farms and other property were stolen and never returned.

From 1948-54, during the period known as McCarthyism, to tame or destroy the industrial unions which were the only organizations in the country that defended working people of every color and nationality, and to crush the leftist militants who had organized them, the government disappeared a dozen unions overnight and jailed their democratically elected leaders. The FBI staged raids all over the country and the government executed two people, Ethel and Julius Rosenberb, as “spies” to make fear general and scare people from speaking and organizing.

Throughout the years after the Civil War and until 1965, the Ku Klux Klan terrorized, lynched, tortured and jailed African-Americans. The KKK controlled the government of 13 states, had chapters in every big city police force, and through their Senators and Congressmen, dominated the federal government. They also controlled the Electoral College, which from the beginning was established to prevent popular election of the President and ensure slave-owners’ control. It is the Electoral College, which made Trump President even though Hillary Clinton got more votes. The KKK, the American Nazis and the Fraternal Order of Police endorsed Trump for President. The KKK just held a public rally to celebrate his election. These groups are killers: they hate Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Blacks and Mexicans. Despite their growing strength, they can be defeated. The ending of legal segrega-

tion proved that. But it will take mass demonstrations, self-defense of the kind advocated by the Black Panthers, Malcolm X and Reies Tijerina, and the kinds of action taken May 1, 2006 in the stay-away strike, to win justice.

Why I voted for Jill Stein of the Eco-Socialist Green Party, not Hillary. Or why I think the Democratic Party machine and the Republican machine are basically the same

Democrat Obama deported more immigrants than any president in U.S. history. Democrat Bill Clinton expanded the police forces by 100,000, militarized the police, continued the “War on Drugs” that doubled the number of people in jail without solving the drug problem, and obliterated the right to *habeas corpus*. Hillary barely talked about the environment and actually supported the expansion of fracking all around the world. Fracking has just caused major earthquakes in Oklahoma. Trump has just appointed a leading denier of climate change to head the Environmental Protection Agency.

Bill Clinton engineered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It allowed American companies to close factories and open them along the Mexican border paying terribly low wages with dangerous working conditions; NAFTA destroyed tens-of-thousands of small Mexican farms, led to waves of immigration to the U.S. in search of jobs and contributed to the rise of the violent drug cartels as people accepted drug dealing as a way to make money and survive.

Obama and Hillary Clinton continued daily to rain death and destruction on Muslim countries, a policy initiated by Bush Jr. With bombs and drones, they have reduced Iraq, Syria and Libya from modern countries with water, electricity and even some rights for women to piles of rubble, hundreds-of-thousands of dead children (500,000

in Iraq alone), religious fanaticism—ISIS—and the flood of refugees into Europe. U.S. policies produce desperation, hate and terrorism.

Obama bailed out banks not schools, social services or the millions who’d lost their jobs and 6,000,000 who lost their homes. Bailing out the banks (\$38 trillion) but not saving peoples’ jobs or homes led to the desperation which opens people to Trump’s rhetoric of hate. Divide and conquer has always been the method of America’s rulers, particularly during the cycles of depression that American and global capitalism produce at least once a decade. Blaming Mexicans for stealing jobs, blaming Blacks for crime, blaming Muslims for “terrorism” is a good way to distract people from the fundamental problems of the capitalist system. Trump built on the history of racism and hate of foreigners in this country. He is dangerous; it is dangerous. He will continue to use hate and violence both by the police and ICE/*La Migra* and by mobs in the streets to distract people from the massive problems of this country.

Thanks for reading this. It is not a class or homework assignment. Many of you asked for whatever information I could provide and the opinions are my own.

Note from Socialist Viewpoint editors:

We at Socialist Viewpoint do not believe that the Green Party is an alternative-party for the working class. The Green Party is structured like bourgeois parties and is dedicated to reforming capitalism instead of overthrowing it. And, while we support all kinds of reforms that make the lives of working people better, like universal healthcare, free education, a real living wage, etc., the kind of party the masses of workers need to achieve these reforms is a democratically organized party of our own, dedicated to transcending capitalism, and building a socialist society where production is controlled by workers to fulfill the needs and wants of all of us—not profits for the few.

Pipelines Leak

Background on the Dakota Access Pipeline

BY LAUREN MCCAULEY

An independent pipeline expert has concluded that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' environmental assessment (EA) of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is insufficient and fails to account for the impact on tribal members, prompting the Standing Rock Sioux to demand that the federal agency "revisit" its approval of the controversial project.

The review, commissioned by the tribe, found that the Army Corps' EA "understates the risk of pipeline failure and related oil release from this pipeline impacting Lake Oahe and the Missouri River," determined Richard Kuprewicz, a pipeline engineer with the consulting firm Accufacts, Inc.¹

Earthjustice, which is representing the Standing Rock Sioux in its litigation against the Corps, outlined additional "areas of deficiency" identified in the review:

1. Shoddy pipeline construction
2. The risks posed by landslides were underestimated
3. Lack of proper safety constructions to contain spills
4. Failure to review impact to residents and environment downstream of the site
5. A risk review of industry spills and containment at similar sites that document problematic regulatory oversight of the industry in North Dakota

In a letter² sent late last week to Jo-Ellen Darcy, assistant secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Standing Rock Sioux chairman Dave Archambault II presents Kuprewicz's

findings in contrast to the EA's determination that building a pipeline across Lake Oahe "will not affect members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe or the Tribal reservation."

The review, he said, "underscores one of the fundamental deficiencies of the Final Environmental Assessment—it assumes, without foundation, that placing a massive oil pipeline just upstream from the Reservation presents no risk to the Tribe."

Alternately, "Mr. Kuprewicz's findings reflect the common sense point that was somehow lost in the Final Environmental Analysis—that pipelines leak, and that when they do so there are often devastating consequences, particularly when the leak contaminates water," he noted.

"This raises the question," Archambault continued, "if the Dakota Access pipeline is so safe that it presents no risk at all when situated on the Tribe's doorstep, why isn't the pipeline safe enough to cross the river north of Bismarck, as originally proposed? The Final EA provides no answer."

Earthjustice staff attorney Jan Hasselman, who represents the Tribe, said, "The law requires a full and transparent analysis of risks like oil spills prior to issuance of a federal permit. It's clear that never happened here."

Indeed, as recent news events have shown, and as Archambault himself pointed out in the letter, "the public record is filled with examples" of pipeline failure. The past two weeks alone have seen a deadly gasoline pipeline explosion in Alabama, and successive pipeline leaks in Oklahoma and

Pennsylvania, respectively discharging crude oil and gasoline.

According to data from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, an average of over 59 oil spills occur each year while the average amount of oil spilled from pipelines topping 47,000 barrels. North Dakota alone had 1238 reported incidents of spills of oil or oilfield wastewater in the 12-month period from July 27, 2015 through July 25, 2016.

Referencing these "sobering" statistics, as well as many of the documented instances, Archambault concluded that the Army Corps should deny the easement for the Lake Oahe pipeline crossing.

—Common Dreams, November 4, 2016

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/11/04/pipelines-leak-expert-finds-government-downplayed-dapl-impact-tribe-and-water>

1 Accufacts Inc., "Clear Knowledge in the Over Information Age"

<http://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/files/10-28-16-Final-Accufacts-Report.pdf>

2 <http://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/files/Ltr-to-Asst-Sec-Darcy-10-28-16.pdf>



Black-White Earnings Gap

Black-White Earnings Gap Returns to 1950 Levels

BY PATRICK BAYER AND KERWIN KOFI CHARLES

After years of progress, the median earnings gap between Black and white men has returned to what it was in 1950, according to new research by economists from Duke University and the University of Chicago.

The experience of African-American men is not uniform, though: The earnings gap between Black men with a college education and those with less education is at an all-time high, the authors say.

The research appears online this week in the National Bureau of Economic Research¹ working paper series.

The paper looks at earnings for working-age men across a span of 75 years, from 1940 to 2014. The earnings gap between Black and white men narrowed during the civil rights era. Then, starting around 1970, the gap between Black and white men's wages started widening once again.

"When it comes to the earnings gap between Black and white men, we've gone all the way back to 1950," said Duke economist Patrick Bayer, who co-authored the paper with Kerwin Kofi Charles of the University of Chicago.

The picture for Black men looks very different at the top of the economic ladder versus the bottom, the authors say. Since the 1960s, top Black salaries have continued to climb. Those advances were fueled by more equal access to universities and high-skilled professions, the study finds.

Meanwhile, a starkly different story transpired at the bottom of the economic ladder. Massive increases in incarceration rates and the general decline of working-class jobs have devastated the labor market prospects of

men with a high school degree or less, the authors say.

The changing economy has been hard on all workers with less than a high school education, but especially devastating for Black men, Bayer said.

"The broad economic changes we've seen since the 1970s have clearly helped people at the top of the ladder," Bayer said. "But the labor market for low-skilled workers has basically collapsed.

"Back in 1940 there were plenty of jobs for men with less than a high school degree. Now education is more and more a determinant of who's working and who's not."

In fact, more and more working-age men in the United States aren't working at all. The number of nonworking white men grew from about eight percent in 1960 to 17 percent in 2014. The numbers look still worse among Black men: In 1960, 19 percent of Black men were not working; in 2014, that number had grown to 35 percent of Black men. That includes men who are incarcerated as well those who can't find jobs.

"The rate at which men are not working has been skyrocketing, and it's not simply the result of the Great Recession," Bayer said. "It's a big part of what's been happening to our economy over the past 40 years."

The situation would be even worse if not for educational gains among African-Americans over the past 75 years, Bayer said.

On average, Black men today have many more years of schooling than Black men of the past, and the education gap between white and Black men has shrunk considerably. Nevertheless, a gap remains: These days, Black men have about a year's less education than white men, on average.

"In essence, the economic benefits that should have come from the substantial gains in education for Black men over the past 75 years have been completely undone by the changing economy, which exacts an ever steeper price for the differences that still remain," Bayer said.

The findings show the need for renewed focus on closing racial gaps in education and school quality, which have been stuck in place for several decades, according to the authors. They also suggest that any economic changes that improve prospects for all low-skilled workers will have the important side effect of reducing racial economic inequality.

"We clearly need to create better job opportunities for everyone in the lower rungs of the economic ladder, where work has become increasingly hard to come by," Bayer said.

—*Black Agenda Report*, November 29, 2016

http://www.blackagendareport.com/black_earnings_at_1950_levels

1 "Divergent Paths: Structural Change, Economic Rank, and the Evolution of Black-White Earnings Differences, 1940-2014," Patrick Bayer and Kerwin Kofi Charles. *NBER Working Paper No. 2279*, November 2016.



Communities Betrayed and Sick

The Environmental Protection Agency Office of Civil Rights under the spotlight

By DR. MARSHA ADEBAYO

The EPA Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is once again under the spotlight for betraying and harming communities that it was supposed to protect. The OCR is required to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. This Act prohibits recipients of federal funds from discriminating on the basis of race. Black, Brown and low-income communities turn to EPA's OCR when local and state regulatory agencies permit landfills, refineries and other businesses to locate in their communities. Many of the pollutants and chemicals emitted from these facilities can trigger serious chronic health conditions, such as asthma, upper respiratory diseases and cancers.

EPA enjoys a generous budget of approximately \$8 Billion dollars. African-Americans contribute a significant amount of funds to the work and mission of EPA through their tax dollars. However, despite the significant African-American financial contribution to EPA, the agency has never considered the health of African-Americans a priority nor worked to develop strategies to ensure that Black communities receive basic life-saving necessities, such as clean water or clean air. One only has to remember the deliberate government poisoning of Flint, Michigan, and EPA's decision, according to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, not to respond to neurotoxic levels of lead for over one year. EPA should not receive credit for its slothful attention and total disregard for the health of the Black population in Flint. History should record that it was the Flint community that forced the Agency through demonstrations, a media campaign and international headlines to provide what meager assistance it renders to Flint's children.

When communities file a complaint under Title 6, EPA is supposed to

decide within 20 days whether to investigate. Many of the complaints involve life threatening environmental conditions and should be handled accordingly. In addition, the Office of Civil Rights is supposed to issue a preliminary finding of the complaint within 180 days. The Agency, however, ignores its own deadlines and punishes EPA whistleblowers that shine light on these issues and provide advocacy on behalf of Black communities smothering under life-threatening pollution. The Agency intentionally drags its feet on providing a resolution to meeting the needs of these communities and instead of providing a preliminary finding within 180 days it generally takes approximately 350 days—about one year. According to an analysis by the Center for Public Integrity, a number of investigations into Title 6 communities have taken years, not days. The Office has dismissed or rejected more than 90 percent of the complaints it has received and has never made a formal finding of discrimination. In other words, the Office of Civil Rights in over two decades has not found in favor of over 300 Title 6 complaints. Conversely, the EPA's Office of Civil Rights has found in favor of businesses over the public health of Black and Brown communities 100 percent of the time. That is the reason, I wrote in *No FEAR: A Whistleblowers Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA*, that the Agency is actually a pro-corporate bureaucracy with a thin layer of green veneer on the outside.

In July, Earthjustice, an environmental law firm, sued the EPA for failing to finish investigations pending for more than a decade. Five communities were the subject of this lawsuit against the EPA—Alabama, Michigan, Texas, New Mexico and California. The

Earthjustice lawsuit described EPA's protocols towards Title 6 Black and Brown communities as a "pattern and practice of unreasonable delay." These unconscionable delays have forced residents to live in unsafe environments around landfills and oil refineries, torn families and communities apart, exposed children to chronic and sometimes fatal diseases. The delays and refusal to choose the health of people over corporate profits rises to the level of criminality. But, no one expects that the Agency will be held accountable or even that EPA Office of Civil Rights staff will be fired whether under Democratic or Republic rule. The reality is that the staff in the Office of Civil Rights is following orders and are being rewarded through continued salary, on-going promotions and bonuses.

The Office of Civil Rights is located within the Office of the EPA Administrator. The Director of the Office of Civil Rights reports directly to the EPA Administrator. This is the smoke screen that is supposed to obfuscate and confuse the public. By titling this Office after the heroic struggle of the Civil Rights movement, evoking the struggles of Birmingham and Selma, the Office hopes to win the good will of Black and Brown communities. However, the Office of Civil Rights is simply carrying out the orders of the EPA Administrator. Whether the EPA is controlled by the Democratic or Republican Parties, the agency has had a consistent and negative impact on Black and Brown communities.

The Office has no power outside of that bestowed by the EPA Administrator. It's important for Black and Brown communities to understand that they are not in battle with a small independent office within EPA but rather the Administrator of the EPA and ulti-

mately the White House. Thus, the Office of Civil Rights should be considered a buffer zone between communities of color and the Office of the Administrator. The Office insulates the Administrator and the White House from Black and Brown communities and provides “credible deniability” for the Administrator and the president on issues of race and injustice. At the end of the day, the major contribution of this office to the Agency is that it acts as a focal point for Title 6 communities to “let off steam” so that victims of environmental racism misdirect their anger thereby providing immunity to the Administrator’s Office or the occupant of the White House.

These communities unfortunately enter the black hole of the Office of Civil Rights only to emerge 20 years later suffering from serious chronic illnesses, broken families, massive debt to attorneys and no hope of receiving justice.

The history of struggle in the U.S. has shown that communities are powerful when they build coalitions to press demands against powerful institutions, such as the EPA. This is the hope of Title 6 communities that their power will be redirected from the labyrinth of EPA to their own hands and they will develop the strategies of coalition building and solidarity with like-minded organizations to force corporations and government agencies clothed in stained green veneer to stand down.

Dr. Marsha Adebayo is the author of the Pulitzer Prize nominated: No FEAR: A Whistleblowers Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA. Her story as a federal government whistleblower is currently highlighted in an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum.

—Black Agenda Report, January 3, 2017

http://www.blackagendareport.com/epa_betrays_black_people

Cuban 5 Member Calls for Solidarity with U.S. Political Prisoners

BY TELESUR

Former Cuban 5 member Rene Gonzalez, who spent 15 years as a political prisoner in the U.S., has launched a campaign to remember “prisoners of conscience” held in U.S. jails in response to a similar campaign launched last week by United States Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power.

On December 10, 2016 Power announced the launch of a U.S. State Department campaign called #FreeToBeHome, which she said would highlight the cases of “prisoners unjustly held around the world and the families they leave behind.” Without any sense of irony, or history, Power added, “we call on all governments to release them. Political prisoners should be free to believe.”

Were Power to believe her own rhetoric, she would call on the U.S. government to release the political prisoners highlighted in Gonzalez’s campaign: Oscar López Rivera, Ana Belén Montes, Leonard Peltier, Julian Assange, Simón Trinidad, and Mumia Abu-Jamal, all deemed political prisoners in the U.S.

TeleSUR looks at the cases raised by Gonzalez and a few more.

Oscar López Rivera

A leader of the Puerto Rican independence movement, López Rivera is currently serving his 35th year in prison on charges related to his independence activities with the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FARN), which fought to turn Puerto Rico into an independent communist state. He is the longest-held political prisoner from Latin America in U.S. history.

Offered clemency by then-President Clinton in 1999, Lopez rejected the offer because it was not extended to

other jailed FARN activists and because he refused to renounce his communist beliefs. As of 2010, Lopez is the sole remaining Puerto Rican revolutionary leader held by the U.S. In December, a group of Swedish politicians called on President Obama to pardon Lopez in his final days in office. “He was convicted and imprisoned because he struggled for his homeland Puerto Rico’s right to self-determination,” they wrote to Obama in an open letter.

Anticipating Power’s campaign call that prisoners should “be free to be home,” the letter called on Obama to “allow Oscar López Rivera to live out the final part of his life in his homeland with his family.”

Ana Belén Montes

A U.S. citizen of Puerto Rican heritage, Belen Montes was charged with espionage on behalf of the Cuban government. At the time of her arrest, two weeks after the September 11, 2001 attack in New York, she worked in the Defense Department as a Cuban specialist and was a key member of an intelligence report team, which concluded that the small Caribbean island did not pose any danger to the U.S.

In pleading guilty to avoid the death penalty, Belen Montes told the court, “I engaged in the activity that brought me before you because I obeyed my conscience rather than the law...I felt morally obligated to help the island defend itself from our efforts to impose our values and our political system on it.”

An international campaign continues to call for her release on humanitarian grounds given that she is held in isolation and denied basic rights such as visitors, phone calls, and letters.

Despite her harsh conditions Belen Montes told interviewers in 2015 “If I

repent, I deny myself...It's not within the framework of my logic. I always knew the possible consequences of what I did." She added, "What matters to me is that the Cuban Revolution exists...What's necessary is that there always be a Cuban Revolution."

Simón Trinidad

Harvard-educated Simon Trinidad, also known as Ricardo Palmera, was the *de facto* foreign minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC. During a 2004 diplomatic trip to Ecuador to meet with U.N. representatives, he was arrested and deported to Colombia, where former President Alvaro Uribe declined to charge him with any crime, and instead conspired with U.S. officials to create a false pretext to deport him to the U.S.

After the U.S. was unable to convict him in his first trial on trumped-up kidnapping charges, a second jury found him guilty in 2008 and sentenced him to 60 years. Despite that conviction, U.S. officials then tried to convict Trinidad on drug charges. After two juries found him innocent of those charges, U.S. officials abandoned the attempted drug prosecution.

Since his 2005 deportation to the U.S., Trinidad has spent 11 years in complete isolation in a U.S. "super-max" prison, an explicit violation of the United Nations Convention against Torture.

In writing about his reasons for joining the revolutionary struggle, Trinidad wrote, "There's our children, women, our families, our communities and normal life. If I don't do this (join the struggle), what am I? A traitor. So I said no. That's why I put up with pain and suffering to fight for what we lack. That's why I took up the guerrilla struggle."

Leonard Peltier

Leonard Peltier was a leading figure in the American Indian Movement during the peak of its political activity in the

1970s. The movement, also known by its acronym AIM, was a militant group championing Native American autonomy and culture. In 1977, Peltier was convicted of the murder of two FBI agents in a trial Amnesty International has called unfair, given that there were no witnesses while key ballistics evidence used to tie Peltier to the murders was later revealed to be false.

The 40-year campaign for his release has been championed by the likes of Nobel Peace Prize winners Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Rigoberta Menchu, as well as the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and the European Parliament. Despite these efforts to secure his release, Peltier remains in jail as the longest-serving political prisoner in the U.S. At age 71 and suffering from diabetes and complications from a massive aneurysm, many fear that without a presidential pardon, he will die in jail.

Many people say it is insane to resist the system, but actually, it is insane not to.

In a May 2016 interview marking his 40-year imprisonment, Peltier spoke about his activism, saying, "That's what we were always fighting to change—the idea that Indian lives weren't worth anything. Indian culture has contributed great things to the world...we wanted to be recognized," he said.

Julian Assange

Julian Assange, founder and editor-in-chief of *WikiLeaks*, has been trapped in the embassy of Ecuador in London since the South American nation granted him political asylum in 2012. Assange and Ecuadorian officials fear that he faces deportation to the U.S. to face espionage charges for his work

revealing U.S. war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In February 2016, the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Assange was essentially being arbitrarily detained given the repeated refusals of both the British and Swedish governments to guarantee that he would not be deported to the U.S. Amnesty International said that extradition to the United States could "expose him to a real risk of serious human rights violations" including "torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

Speaking of his confinement, Assange said, "...for someone who has tried to give others liberty all their adult life, (it) is absolutely intolerable."

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Journalist, acclaimed prison activist, and former Black Panther Party member Mumia Abu-Jamal is perhaps the most well-known political prisoner in the U.S.

Sentenced to death in 1982 for the alleged murder of a Philadelphia police officer in a trial called a "travesty of justice" by civil liberties advocates and human rights organizations such as the NAACP, ACLU, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, Abu-Jamal spent almost 30 years on death row until 2011, when his sentence was commuted to life in prison after an appeal courts ruled that the original trial and sentence were tainted by racism.

Through his prison writings and popular radio broadcasts, Abu-Jamal has remained a key dissident voice in the U.S. reporting extensively on the prison-industrial complex and the institutionalization of white supremacy. In the past two years, the campaign for his release has gained added impetus given his deteriorating health. In September, a federal court ruled that prison officials had violated the U.S. constitutional guarantee against "cruel

and unusual punishment” by denying Abu-Jamal treatment for Hepatitis C.¹

Abu-Jamal has said about his struggle for justice, “Do you see law and order? There is nothing but disorder, and instead of law there is the illusion of security. It is an illusion because it is built on a long history of injustices: racism, criminality, and the genocide of millions. Many people say it is insane to resist the system, but actually, it is insane not to.”

Chelsea Manning

U.S. Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning was sentenced in 2013 to 35 years in military prison for revealing evidence of U.S. war crimes committed in Afghanistan and Iraq. While other U.S. military officials who have released classified information for personal gain have faced minimal consequences—such as former CIA Director and commander of NATO and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan David Petraeus, and Donald Trump’s pick for National Security Adviser Retired General Michael Flynn—Manning, who released information about govern-

ment crimes in the public interest, spent months under conditions denounced by the U.N. special rapporteur on torture as “cruel, inhumane, and degrading,” and a violation of U.N. conventions against torture.

Calls for Manning’s release have increased after two serious suicide attempts drew further attention to her harsh detention conditions. U.S. officials have repeatedly denied her the medically necessary treatment for her gender transition process. Despite this, Manning has become a trans rights activist, declaring in *The Guardian* newspaper, “I am a transgender woman and the government is denying my civil rights.”

The Prisoners at Guantanamo Bay

For 14 years, the U.S. has operated this “island outside the law,” where 800 men have been illegally detained, tortured, and held without charge or trial in violation of both U.S. and international law. Despite President Obama’s promise to close the military prison, something the American Civil Liberties Union calls a “shameful episode in American history,” 49 prisoners remain



Rene Gonzalez

jailed, despite facing no charges or having ever been convicted of a crime. The U.S. government itself has declared that 20 of these men—detained during the U.S.’s so-called “War on Terror”—are entirely innocent of any crimes and pose no threat to the U.S. While every single national and international human rights group has called for President Obama to close the prison and release the prisoners before his term ends, the U.S. government is in the process of renovating the facility, increasing fears that it will continue to be a key part of the U.S. national security apparatus under President Trump.

—telesurtv.net, December 16, 2016

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/FreeToBeHonoured-Campaign-to-Highlight-US-Political-Prisoners-20161216-0001.html>

1 On January 3, 2017 Federal Judge Robert Mariani ordered the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections to immediately give Mumia Abu-Jamal the life-saving latest direct-acting antiviral medications that have a 95 percent cure rate!



Mass Surveillance in the West

Three new scandals show how pervasive and dangerous mass surveillance is in the West, vindicating Snowden

By GLENN GREENWALD

November 4, 2016—While most eyes are focused on the presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, three major events prove how widespread, and dangerous, mass surveillance has become in the West. Standing alone, each event highlights exactly the severe threats that motivated Edward Snowden to blow his whistle; taken together, they constitute full-scale vindication of everything he's done.

Earlier this month, a special British court that rules on secret spying activities issued an emphatic denunciation of the nation's domestic mass surveillance programs. The court found that "British security agencies have secretly and unlawfully collected massive volumes of confidential personal data, including financial information, on citizens for more than a decade." Those agencies, the court found, "operated an illegal regime to collect vast amounts of communications data, tracking individual phone and web use and other confidential personal information, without adequate safeguards or supervision for 17 years."

On Thursday, an even more scathing condemnation of mass surveillance was issued by the Federal Court of Canada. The ruling "faulted Canada's domestic spy agency for unlawfully retaining data and for not being truthful with judges who authorize its intelligence programs." Most remarkable was that these domestic, mass surveillance activities were not only illegal, but completely unknown to virtually the entire population in Canadian democracy, even though their scope has indescribable implications for core liberties: "The center in question

appears to be the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's equivalent of a crystal ball—a place where intelligence analysts attempt to deduce future threats by examining, and re-examining, volumes of data."

The third scandal also comes from Canada—a critical partner in the Five Eyes spying alliance along with the U.S. and U.K.—where law enforcement officials in Montreal are now defending "a highly controversial decision to spy on a *La Presse* columnist by tracking his cellphone calls and texts and monitoring his whereabouts as part of a necessary internal police investigation." The targeted journalist, Patrick Lagacé, had enraged police officials by investigating their abusive conduct, and they then used surveillance technology to track his calls and movements to unearth the identity of his sources. Just as that scandal was exploding, it went, in the words of the *Montreal Gazette*, "from bad to worse" as the ensuing scrutiny revealed that police had actually "tracked the calls and movements of six journalists that year after news reports based on leaks revealed Michel Arseneault, then president of Quebec's largest labor federation, had his phone tapped."

Speaking this week at Montreal's McGill University, Snowden called for the resignation of Montreal's police chief and denounced the spying as a "radical attack on the operations of the free press." Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, "Obviously I think that the troubling stories—troubling for all Canadians—coming out of Québec...will lead to reflection on how we must and can continue to ensure protection of the press and their

rights." The Canadian Journalists for Free Expression's Tom Henheffer made the key point—about this specific abuse but also mass surveillance systems generally:

You can't even make the argument that this is just a few bad apples because it was authorized by a justice of the peace. This is the system as it's supposed to work. Which just goes to show that the whole system is broken.

So just this month alone, two key members of the Five Eyes alliance have been found by courts and formal investigations to be engaged in mass surveillance that was both illegal and pervasive, as well as, in the case of Canada, abusing surveillance powers to track journalists to uncover their sources. When Snowden first spoke publicly, these were exactly the abuses and crimes he insisted were being committed by the mass surveillance regime these nations had secretly erected and installed, claims that were vehemently denied by the officials in charge of those systems.

Yet with each new investigation and judicial inquiry, and as more evidence is unearthed, Snowden's core claims are increasingly vindicated. Western officials are indeed addicted to unaccountable, secretive, abusive systems of mass surveillance used against their own citizens and foreigners alike, and the more those systems take root, the more core liberties are eroded.

—*The Intercept*, November 4, 2016

<https://theintercept.com/2016/11/04/three-new-scandals-show-how-pervasive-and-dangerous-mass-surveillance-is-in-the-west-vindicating-snowden/>

Fidel: The Proof is in the Pudding

BY CINDY SHEEHAN

December 1, 2016—Where to start about last week's death of 90-year old revolutionary, Fidel Castro?

Well, we'll get to the adverse propaganda soon, but to be clear, I admire Castro and I admire the people of Cuba and the Cuban Revolution.¹ Because I admire them, it does not mean I worship Fidel, or deny anything negative about him or Cuba. Was Fidel perfect? Is any person perfect? Despite any criticism of Fidel, we should evaluate Cuba today—the “pudding” as you will, or the Fruits of the Revolution.

A lot of people denounce the Castros and the Cuban Revolution because it was “violent.” Needless to say, Fidel didn't set out to overthrow a utopian society. The revolution waged battle against a very brutal, U.S.-backed mobster, Fulgencio Batista. As here in the U.S. today, the gap between the rich and the poor in Cuba back then was immoral and the oppression was not supportable.

I ask if the elitist American Revolution that kicked the British out was peaceful and bloodless? Did the colonists revere the British loyalists and traitors? No, it was a bloody revolution and many poor people who didn't have a stake in the

new country were exploited and used by the elites for their own gain. For the most part, the wealthy land and slave owners remained wealthy, and the poor foot-soldier remained poor. In 2016, the U.S. has the world's largest income disparity (according to the GINI coefficient²) in the entire world, and I can only find speculative articles about Cuban income inequality and I cannot find GINI numbers, because the data is compiled with information from the World Bank and the Cuban Revolution withdrew from the dastardly World Bank in 1960.

When “Mr. Pot meet Mr. Kettle”—Senator Sanders calls out the Cuban economy for being a “disaster,” he does not go on to recount the vicious U.S. blockade of Cuba that has persisted for over five decades. The U.S. only tightened the blockade during the “Special” period in Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union when the people of Cuba needed the most help. In contrast, when Katrina struck New Orleans hard in 2005, the Cuban government had 75 doctors and supplies waiting on the tarmac in Havana to fly to Louisiana to help out. Of course, to punish Cuba, the Bush regime denied that help, which ended up greatly harming the mostly brown and black people of New Orleans the most.

Cuba's planned economy has not only managed to survive that blockade but provide excellent health, housing, and educational benefits to its citizens. Give me some of that “disaster!” Please!

According to its own CIA Factbook, Cuba has a lower infant mortality rate than the U.S. and according to UNICEF, Cuba has a zero percent child malnutrition rate due to the fact that food is a human right and not a privilege. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA),

13.1 million children under 18 in the United States live in households where they are unable to consistently access enough nutritious food necessary for a healthy life.

Housing is also a human right in Cuba and there are no homeless.

Cuba not only has healthcare for everyone, but it operates a medical school that trains doctors from all over the world to go and practice in underserved and poorer communities (even in the U.S.) Education is free through university and Cuba also has a higher literacy rate than the United States and no one is burdened with crippling life-long debt after obtaining degrees in Cuba. Nor do poor people feel the obligation to join the military to receive an education while running the risk of killing or being killed, as in the USA.

I look at the United States which is waging at least a half dozen wars for resources and other financial opportunity in the Middle East and Africa and occupying about 130 countries with over 900 military bases, including one in Guantanamo, Cuba which it refuses to close, and I note that Cuba is not militarily engaged in, or occupying one single country. Hmm....how “disastrous”—a nation that puts people over the Military Industrial Complex. Again, may we have a portion of that “disaster” over here, please?

The police in Cuba carry no guns, compared with the 963 (according to the *Washington.comPost*³) USAians killed by cops here in the U.S., just in 2016. Additionally, the USA executes several dozen prisoners every year, where Cuba has not executed a prisoner since 2003 and all death sentences there were commuted in 2010.

I have been to Cuba about half-a-dozen times now and every other coun-



try in the world (except for the U.S. and its illegitimate little brother, Israel) has a healthy relationship with Cuba. Cuba welcomes tourists from all over the planet and now with travel restrictions being somewhat loosened by the U.S. Imperial State, I hope more and more Americans get to travel there and find out how wonderful and gorgeous the island nation is and how much absolute bullshit they have had shoved down their throats by the U.S. government and toady media for decades.

To me, Fidel Castro Ruz will be vindicated by history not only for his courage in defeating a dictator in 1959, but also for continuing for the rest of his life to fulfill the promises of the Cuban Revolution and for his love of all oppressed people.

I have no condemnation of Fidel Castro or the Cuban Revolution, but my question is, why do we put up with unconscionable oppression, poverty, war, and police state brutality here in the U.S.? Who will rise up to defeat the mobsters in DC?

Rest in power, Fidel.

August 13, 1926–November 25, 2016

¡Hasta la victoria, siempre!

—*The Soapbox*, December 1, 2016

<http://cindysheehanssoapbox.blogspot.com>

1 “Despite U.S. Policy, Fidel Castro Turns 90!”

<http://cindysheehanssoapbox.blogspot.com/2016/07/despite-us-policy-fidel-castro-turns-90.html>

2 “...a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income distribution of a nation’s residents, and is the most commonly used measure of inequality. It was developed by the Italian statistician and sociologist Corrado Gini and published in his 1912 paper *Variability and Mutability*”

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

3 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2016/>

Our Fidel

Fidel Castro, 1926-2016

BY CLAUDIO KATZ

Of all the tributes to Fidel Castro and assessments of the Cuban leader’s contribution to the world socialist movement, this one by Argentine political economist Claudio Katz seems to me particularly outstanding. It was published first on his web site. My translation and notes. — Richard Fidler

With Fidel’s death Latin America’s principal revolutionary figure of the last century has left us. Amidst our great sorrow at his passing it is difficult to assess his stature. But while emotion clouds any evaluation, the *Comandante’s* influence¹ can be appreciated with greater clarity now that he has left.

The media simply emphasize that importance in a descriptive sense. They describe how he was present in the major events of the last 50 years. And his worst enemies in the empire confirm that overwhelming historical influence. They celebrate his death in order to forget that he lasted in office throughout the mandates of ten U.S. presidents and survived countless assassination attempts by the CIA.

Cuba is the obsession of the Pentagon and the frustration of the State Department. No other country of that size has inflicted so many defeats on the empire. After 53 years David forced Goliath to re-establish diplomatic relations.²

Fidel arouses admiration that borders on devotion. The praise stems from his capacity to make possible what was highly improbable. But this fascination is frequently divorced from the content of his achievement.

Many idolize Fidel but from the standpoint of capitalism. They extol the Caribbean leader while promoting variants of the system of exploitation that the *Comandante* fought through-

out his life. In reality, they praise the creator of alien universes while rejecting any such journey by themselves.

For the Left, Fidel always had another meaning. He was the principal designer of a revolutionary socialist project of Latin American emancipation. He put into practice the objective inaugurated by Lenin in 1917 and therefore occupied in Latin America a place equivalent to that of the promoter of the soviets.

But unlike his precursor, Fidel led for decades the process he initiated in 1960. He can be assessed as much for his triumph as for his management.

From a longer-lasting perspective, Castro’s achievement is comparable with the campaigns undertaken by Bolívar and San Martín. He led regional actions attempting to link a second independence for Latin America with the international advance of socialism.

Fidel tackled these tasks of Cyclopean proportions while maintaining a very close relationship with his followers. He addressed his messages to millions of sympathizers who cheered him on various continents. He achieved a rational and passionate connection with the multitudes who heard him speak in countless meetings.

The man and the epic

The Cuban leader always acted with audacity. He radicalized his project under the pressure of the empire and adopted a socialist assignment that smashed all the dogmas of the epoch. He demonstrated that it was possible to initiate an anticapitalist process 90 miles from Miami, and with the OLAS³ he restored the objective of the region’s anti-imperialist unity.

These three facets—the revolutionary, the socialist and the Latin American

emancipator—Fidel shared with Ché. The same meeting of minds that brought them together in the landing of the Granma⁴ was verified in the strategy of armed actions against the dictatorships and reactionary governments. They maintained political agreements that disprove everything written about the animosity between Castro and Guevara.

The *Comandante* restored socialist internationalism after decades of mere statements (or clear betrayals) by the Kremlin bureaucracy. He extended this to Africa with the sending of fighters who played a central role in the defeat of apartheid.

These actions replaced the old connection of slavery between Africa and Latin America with a new relationship of solidarity against the common enemies. This attitude elicited enormous affection for Cuba in the Afro-American communities, corroborated in the impressive visits Fidel made to Harlem and his encounters with Muhammed Ali, Malcolm X or Harry Belafonte.

But Fidel's historic stature emerged with greater clarity after the implosion of the USSR. He achieved anew what appeared impossible by sustaining Cuba's survival amidst unprecedented adversity. He led in the harshest sacrifices of the special period and sustained a collective resistance forged after three decades of revolution.

That battle of convictions was probably more extraordinary than many military actions. Fidel achieved what very few leaders have achieved in similar circumstances.

That victory served as an example for the radical processes that sprouted in the new millennium. When neoliberalism touched off popular rebellions in South America, Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales had a political reference that was absent in other parts of the world. Fidel maintained the socialist ideal as a compass, to be recreated on other foundations.

In Latin America's new stage, the *Comandante* encouraged campaigns against the external debt and Free Trade treaties, and with ALBA⁵ promoted agencies adapted to the post-dictatorship context in Latin America.

In this context the longing for the "new man" reappeared in the missions of the Cuban doctors. These healthcare contingents demonstrated how the life of the defenseless cast aside by capitalism could be protected.

Fidel combined his aptitude as a speaker (e.g., the "history will absolve me" type of discourse) with military genius (the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola) and geopolitical intelligence (for acting in the international order.)

He developed this remarkable profile while maintaining an extremely modest life style. His private life is almost unknown because of the strict separation he established between his privacy and his public exposure.

Over several decades he was involved in all the details of Cuban reality. His tireless activity was popularized with a saying that alluded to this ubiquity (*y en eso llegó Fidel*—"and therein came Fidel.")

He probably decided to organize his own retirement in order to counteract that overwhelming effect. Beginning in 2006 he placed himself in the background and concentrated his entire activity on the battle of ideas. He deployed a prolific critical analysis of environmental depredation and the poverty generated by capitalism.

Castro's surprising trajectory confirms many conclusions of Marxist theoreticians on the role of the individual in history. A society's direction is never dictated by the exceptional conduct of the great leaders. That evolution is mainly determined by the objective conditions prevailing in each epoch.

But in the decisive events that define that course, certain individuals play an irreplaceable role. Fidel confirmed that principle.

It is important to remember that protagonism when confronted with the naive myth that attributes the achievements of the Cuban process to the "pressure of the masses." This formula assumes that the extraordinary direction taken by the country was due to radical demands from below that the leaders had to support.

In fact it was the opposite that occurred. A consistent leadership convinced the majority through the exemplary nature of their conduct. Fidel led the leaders who were in charge of this epic achievement.

Unresolved dilemmas

Cuba has carried out not the revolution it wanted but the one it could make. There is therefore still a significant distance between ambition and attainment. The major cause of this disparity is glaringly obvious: no titan can fully build socialism in a small plot of land under the relentless harassment of the planet's major power. The surprising thing is the degree to which Cuba was able to advance despite being faced by such a rival.

This small country has won enormous triumphs that reinforced national self-esteem and the authority of the *Comandante*. From the Bay of Pigs to the return of the child, Elián, and the liberation of the five captives in the United States, Cuba won major victories under Fidel's leadership.

But none of those milestones managed to remove the blockade, to close Guantánamo, or to neutralize the terrorist groups trained by the CIA. Faced with the economic harassment, the family blackmail, the temptation of U.S. citizenship or the mirage of opulent consumerism conveyed by Miami, the tenacity of the Cubans seems miraculous.

This heroism has coexisted with the particular problems the revolution has confronted for a long time now. These difficulties must be assessed in com-

parison with what has been achieved, bearing in mind the objective limitations affecting the island.

The economy is a central area among those problems. Cuba has shown how a non-capitalist way of thinking can help to avoid hunger, generalized delinquency and school abandonment. In a country with resources closer to Haiti's than Argentina's, advances have been achieved in infant nutrition, mortality rates and healthcare that surprise everyone.

But the mistaken imitation of the Russian model of complete nationalization produced ineffective results that severely hampered agro-industrial productivity. This mistaken course reflected the difficulty in reconciling continental revolutionary strategies with market-oriented policies. The idealism required by the first objective collided with the egoism of commercial life.

After the special period, the country has survived with tourism, agreements with foreign companies and a dual currency market that has segmented the population between those who receive remittances and those who don't. The society has changed with this emerging social stratification and the subsequent expansion of market activity in order to save foreign exchange and revive agriculture.

Fidel was personally the motive force behind this difficult turn, well aware of the suicide that a return to the shortages of the nineties would entail. Many analysts thought that a return to capitalism had begun, forgetting that the capitalist system presupposes private ownership of the major companies and banks. The reforms have so far opened up more favorable opportunities for the cooperatives, small property and undertakings without allowing the formation of a new ruling class.

The present model seeks to recover high growth rates while simultaneously

limiting social inequality. It therefore preserves the economic pre-eminence of the state sector combined with public health and education systems.

Although the changes are proceeding slowly within a context of increasing relief, the three long-term alternatives—capitalist restoration, the Chinese model, or socialist renewal—remain open.

The primacy of one of those models will no longer be the work of Fidel, who rejected the first option, was assessing the second, and favored the third. His legacy is to continue the egalitarian project within the narrow margins that currently exist in which to implement it.

It is not easy to disentangle this course when the weight of the market, foreign investment, tourism and remittances is increasing. But the suppression of those supports of the economy would lead to the end of the revolution through simple asphyxiation. The balance sought by the reforms is an indispensable foundation for any future transformation.

Significant challenges

The bourgeois establishment has always contrasted the "dictatorship" of the island with the marvels of western democracy. The presidents of the U.S. plutocracy, with great hypocrisy, typically object to the island's single party system as if the commonality shared by Republicans and Democrats allowed more diversity.

In addition, they avoid mentioning how the electoral colleges violate majority suffrage, and the low level of electoral participation in their country compared with the high participation of the Cubans.

Even greater duplicity is exhibited by the rightists in Latin America. While endorsing the institutional *coups d'états* in Honduras, Paraguay or Brazil, they wax indignant over the absence of republican formalities in Cuba.

The critics on the left point in a different direction. They question the restrictions on individual freedoms that have given rise to numerous injustices in Cuba.

But if we assess the five decades that have gone by, what is notable is the almost bloodless nature of all the radical transformations effected. It is enough to compare the small number of human losses with the record in other revolutionary processes. The high level of political participation explains this achievement.

Cuba has never suffered the tragedy of the Gulags and therefore avoided the collapse experienced by the USSR. Its political model is very controversial, but to this point no theoretician of direct, soviet or participative democracy has indicated how to govern under the empire's harassment without resorting to defensive measures that restrict citizens' rights.

The revolution itself has tried different mechanisms to correct the errors that this situation generates.

Many analysts think the bureaucracy is the main cause of the country's misfortunes, or the great beneficiary of the malformations in the political regime. There is no doubt about its responsibility in many mishaps. But since this stratum will exist as long as the state endures, not much is to be gained from blaming it for all the ills.

To be sure, the bureaucracy greatly increases the inequality and inefficiency. Egalitarianism helps to counteract the first but does not correct the second. A growing democratization provides a counterweight to these misfortunes but produces no miracles. In those intricate fields of state functioning Fidel's calls to assume responsibility were always more useful than waiting for magic laboratory recipes.

Foreign policy is another focus for harsh questioning of Castroism. The mass media presented Fidel as a mere pawn of the Soviet Union, not recog-

nizing the difference that separates a revolutionary from any servile ruler. They did not imagine any conduct for Cuba other than that practiced by the puppets of the empire.

Some left critics did not understand Fidel's strategy either. The Cuban leader based himself on alliances with the USSR in order to drive forward a global revolutionary process that his partner rejected.

The tension between the two parties was confirmed on countless occasions: the October missile crisis, the Vietnam war, the uprisings in Africa or Latin America. There were concessions and sometimes errors by the *Comandante*, such as his approval of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. That occupation buried the socialist renewal that the Prague Spring had promised.

But throughout the period of greatest revolutionary ferment in Latin America, Fidel opted for a balance between diplomatic compromises and continued support of the rebel movements. He sought to overcome Cuba's isolation, maintaining support for the struggles of the oppressed. Castro had to combine the new exigencies of foreign policy with his ideals as a revolutionary.

The right continued to criticize him for his support to popular uprisings, and some currents on the left objected to his indulgent attitude toward governments of the ruling classes.

Much of Fidel's advice was certainly problematic, but responsibility for the decisions remained in the hands of those who received these suggestions. The *Comandante* always conveyed the validity of the decision as he saw it in the processes of each country and his approach was marked by defiance of the authorities of the left of his time.

Nor should we forget how Castro dismissed the recommendations of the Communist party⁶ in the Sierra Maestra and the opinions of the Kremlin in regard to the Latin American insurgency. The Cuban lead-

er taught us through his own practice how a revolutionary acts.

The best tribute

Fidel has died in a very difficult year. Figures as detestable as Macri, Temer⁷ or Trump have come to government. Their ideologists are back to proclaiming the end of the egalitarian projects, forgetting how many times they have pronounced this same sentence. Fidel would have said that we must accordingly understand what is happening in order to overcome despondency.

Many editorial writers state that Castro did not understand the present period of consumption, individualism and pragmatism. But in any case he grasped the crisis of capitalism that determines such conduct. That central fact is invisible to Fidel's challengers.

His most vulgar enemies in Miami celebrated his passing with music, confirming the worthless value they assign to human life. But the festivities were meager consolation for conspirators who have failed to build the least base of support within the island.

Since Fidel retired a decade ago, the repeated speculation over Cuba's future has drawn less attention. However, it is of great interest to find out what Trump will do. We do not know yet whether the brutal statements he made about Castro's death are part of his uncontrolled verbal diarrhea or are a foretaste of greater aggression.

Whatever the case, Latin America must prepare to resist a president-elect who has promised to expel millions of undocumented residents. A new anti-imperialist battle is approaching, and it requires fighting against skepticism and resignation.

Some people say that Fidel embodied the ideals of an older segment of the population removed from the expectations of the youth. They do not take into account how capitalism is striking at the new generation, pushing it to recreate the resistance. The devel-

opment of that action will tend to update the socialist project of Latin American emancipation.

Fidel struggled for the revolutionary transformations that this society needs. It is now up to us to continue his work.

Claudio Katz is a researcher with the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), a professor at the University of Buenos Aires, and a member of the Left Economists (EDI).

—*Life on the Left*, December 5, 2016

<http://lifeonleft.blogspot.ca/2016/12/fidel-castro-1926-2016.html>

1 Fidel Castro is often referred to as *Comandante*, or Commander, in the Latin American left, in reference to his informal title as "Commander in Chief of the Cuban Revolution," a legacy of the guerrilla struggle of the 1950s.

2 See "Release of Cuban Five Opens New Chapter in Cuba-U.S. Relations."

3 Latin American Organization of Solidarity

4 The name of the boat in which the initial cadres of the anti-Batista guerrilla force travelled from Mexico to Cuba in 1956.

5 Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

6 Then known in Cuba as the Partido Socialista Popular

7 Mauricio Macri, the right-wing President of Argentina, and Michel Temer, the acting President of Brazil installed in a parliamentary *coup* against the elected President Dilma Rousseff.

From a longer-lasting perspective, Castro's achievement is comparable with the campaigns undertaken by Bolívar and San Martín. He led regional actions attempting to link a second independence for Latin America with the international advance of socialism.

Fidel Castro

Those who lead are human not gods

BY ENRIQUE OJITO



Sculptor Enzo Gallo Chiapardi hurriedly crafted a bust of Fidel on the night before the Caravan of Liberty reached Havana, January 8, 1959, after triumphantly crossing the island following the Rebel Army's victory. With the same speed, upon hearing the news of the sculpture erected near the Colombia military base, Fidel ordered that it be immediately removed, to the Italian artist's dismay.

Given such evidence, it should not have surprised us to hear the leader of the Cuban Revolution's last wishes—announced by Raúl in Santiago de Cuba's Antonio Maceo Plaza—that after his death, neither his name or likeness should ever be used to name any institution or public site, nor should monuments, busts, or statues in his memory ever be erected.

Even prior to this announcement, certain media had been perplexed when President Raúl Castro Ruz communicated Fidel's death this past November 25, and reported the *Comandante en Jefe's* request that his remains be cremated.

More than one international journalist asked if plazas and other public spaces would soon bear the name Fidel Castro. Speculation fueled expecta-

tions. Some even recalled that Fidel had previously opposed honoring leaders with statues and avenues bearing their names, while they were alive.

The man who resisted the hostility of eleven U.S. administrations understood the dangers and consequences of personality cults. That is why one of the first laws adopted after the triumph of the Revolution, January 1, 1959, was an absolutely unprecedented prohibition on erecting statues of living leaders or using their names for any street, city, town, or factory... likewise ruling out official photographs of authorities in government offices.

Fidel, the statesman, talked about this law in a speech on March 13, 1966, saying, "It is not necessary to be seeing a statue on every corner, or the name of some leader on every town, all over the place. No! Because this would reveal a lack of confidence in the people on the part of leaders; this would reveal a very poor conception of the people, of the masses, as incapable of believing because of a lack of consciousness, or having confidence because of a lack of consciousness—artificially fabricating consciousness or confidence, using reflex responses."

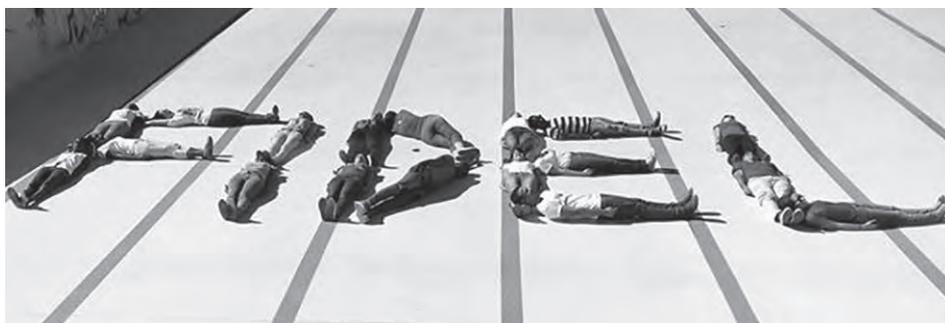
He referred to Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, and Vladimir I. Lenin in his remarks, saying that they never "made gods of themselves," but rather "were humble their entire lives, until death, loath to cults," he added.

Fidel knew the history of humanity and was clear on the role played by personality cults, without distinguishing between countries based on capitalism or socialism, ranging from Mao Tse Tung to Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, statues of whom proliferated across the Dominican Republic, where even churches were told to popularize the slogan, "Trujillo on earth, God in heaven."

Reference texts indicate than the term "personality cult" was first used in 1956 by Nikita Khrushchev, secretary general of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in a speech denouncing Stalin, during the 20th Congress of the organization.

In Rosental and Ludin's Dictionary of Philosophy, it is defined as "blind deference to the authority of a figure, excessive consideration of real merits, the conversion of a historical figure's name into a fetish."

Maintaining a philosophical lens, it is not difficult to see that underlying such cults is an idealistic conception of history—as Thomas Carlyle would say—which considers the will of individuals, as opposed to the action of the masses, as the determining factor in making history, precisely as Francisco Franco would have his compatriots believe his self-proclaimed status as god's messenger and ruler of Spain by the grace of god.





As Fidel stated in 1966, events have confirmed the Marxist precept, “It is not men, but rather peoples who write history,” while at the same time recognizing, “The revolutionary leader is necessary as an instrument of the people, necessary as an instrument of the Revolution.”

In more than one international forum, Cuban researcher and journalist Luis Toledo Sande has spared no words denouncing the allegations of a personality cult of Fidel in Cuba, noting that such accusations are coming, in fact, from countries where university degrees are granted in the name of monarchies.

Toledo, who has also studied José Martí, noted that in Cuba, for example, the names of leaders’ family members are not attached to public institutions either, no matter how charming they may be, although it is here, some allege, where a personality cult exists.

Toledo recalled, years later, that his comments were not included in the summary of the event during which they were made, due, he was told, to space limitations. Nevertheless, he has said he would have liked them to have been published, so no one might think they were excluded because he used the metaphor, “the noose in the house of the hanged man.”

The supposed personality cult of Fidel and the media campaign against Cuba are two sides of the same coin; that is both seek to discredit the leader as well as his most important work: the Revolution, in which the people play the leading role.

When Nicaraguan Tomás Borge was asked about the issue, he responded, “In a country like this one, it is very difficult for some form of absolute power to exist, because Cubans, with their idiosyncrasies, their mentality, argue everything, analyze everything; it could just as well be baseball, agriculture, politics, anything; Cubans discuss it all, they have character, a special idiosyncrasy.”

These virtues, verified in the people by Fidel, are far removed from the perspective of Plato, the first to address the elements associated with the charisma of leaders, who described the masses as ignorant and malleable, at the whim of charismatic individuals.

Leadership and political charisma, are terms which have inspired many to think:

“Aristotle, Machiavelli, Weber, Freud and Bourdieu, have been epitomized in the person who headed the Cuban state for more than 50 years and survived 638 attempts on his life, emanating basically from the

entrails of the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency, looking to eliminate his example that inspired the world.

“Despite such real—not mythical—greatness, his body was reduced to ashes, which have been resting, since December 4, 2016, inside a massive rock in Santiago de Cuba’s Santa Ifigenia Cemetery. The site dedicated to his memory, could well have been placed on top of Mt. Turquino, exemplifying modesty and austerity, contrary to the forecasts of detractors of the man who did not seek glory, but encountered it along his way.” (From *Escambray* newspaper)

—*Granma*, December 16, 2016

<http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2016-12-16/fidel-castro-those-who-lead-are-human-not-gods>

“It is not necessary to be seeing a statue on every corner, or the name of some leader on every town, all over the place. No! Because this would reveal a lack of confidence in the people on the part of leaders; this would reveal a very poor conception of the people, of the masses, as incapable of believing because of a lack of consciousness, or having confidence because of a lack of consciousness—artificially fabricating consciousness or confidence, using reflex responses.”

A Eulogy for Fidel

BY DANNY HAIPHONG

Fidel Castro's physical form passed away on November 25th, 2016. However, what he embodied will never be forgotten. Castro dedicated most of his life to the construction of socialism and the destruction of imperialism. His leadership in the successful Cuban Revolution has left a permanent mark on the world stage. For imperialism, Fidel is forever an enemy of the U.S. state for his refusal to follow the empire's dictates for over half-a-century. But for much of the world's proletariat and people, Fidel is viewed as a true working class hero whose legacy remains in motion.

U.S. imperialism hates Fidel because he committed the greatest crime one could ever commit. Fidel was not a dictator that repressed his own people as *CNN* would have us believe. U.S. imperialism does not hate the former Cuban head of state because he stripped liberties from the Cuban people. The system of profit and empire hates Fidel because he fought for the exact opposite of what he has been accused of all these years. Fidel's leading role in the Cuban Revolution helped build a new society and a new people rooted in the principles of Marxism. The Cuban revolution provided a glimpse into a future free from the exploitation and oppression inherent in the old imperialist order.

Although Fidel wasn't the only leader of the Cuban Revolution, he was perhaps the most important. Fidel was a masterful orator and a revolutionary intellectual who studied theory vigorously. He applied Marxist theory to the struggle to free Cuba from the grips of imperialist and neo-colonial domination. As a military strategist, Fidel was matched by few. Under his guidance, the socialist Cuban government achieved what few thought was possible.

Cuba's achievements cannot be understated. Prior to 1959, Cuba was ruled by a dictatorship of neo-colonialism and imperialism. The military state of Fulgencio Batista siphoned Cuba's wealth to a few U.S. corporations. Cuba's majority peasant and worker population was mired with illiteracy, extreme poverty, and racism. The Cuban Revolution turned the world upside down. Fidel led an organized band of guerilla forces that propelled the people into power. The wealth of

Cuba's willingness to assist the struggle of oppressed people and resist imperialism is intimately connected to Fidel Castro's life work and leadership.

the ruling class was expropriated and a socialist democracy was established. Every person in Cuba now has the opportunity to be elected and participate in the governing of socialism, whether indirectly through popular organizations such as the trade unions or directly through the National Assembly of People's Power.

Equally impressive are the material gains the Cuban people have won from the redistribution of wealth. Illiteracy has been swept into the dustbin of history. The Cuban healthcare system offers free, quality medical care to all Cubans and deploys tens-of-thousands of doctors around the world to do the same. Cuba's investment in healthcare has led to achievements such as the development of a lung cancer vaccine and a lower infant mortality rate than

the U.S. The socialist republic's education system has also been heralded one of the best in the region. Education is provided free of cost in Cuba from elementary to higher education.

In Cuba, homelessness doesn't exist. Unemployment remains low and mostly accounted for by Cuba's robust social welfare system. Cuba has zero percent malnutrition. The nation has taken pride in the fact that while child homelessness is rampant around the world, no child sleeps without a home in Cuba. Cuba has greatly reduced the institutional racism and sexism that characterized life prior to the revolution. Women play a prominent role in Cuban society within institutions such as the Federation of Cuban Women, while Afro Cubans have benefited the most from the gains of the revolution. LGBTQ rights and living standards have also improved with the creation of CENESEX. Transgender individuals can go to Cuba for gender reassignment surgery free of cost.

Internationalism

Fidel's role in the Cuban Revolution cannot be confined to domestic achievement. From day one of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel and the Cuban people committed themselves to fighting with the oppressed for national liberation and socialist revolution in every corner of the globe. The Cuban Revolution gave direct aid to the Vietnamese people in their struggle against U.S. and Western imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, Cuba played a leading part in ending the apartheid regime in South Africa. From 1975 to 1988, Cuba sent about 400,000 medical and military personnel to assist the Angolan people in the struggle against Portuguese and South African colonialism. Cuba's assistance not only led to the liberation of Angola,

but also the independence of Namibia and the eventual fall of the Apartheid South African government.

It is difficult for people in the United States to appreciate Fidel's contribution to the worldwide struggle for freedom for the sheer fact that Washington remains the top purveyor of imperialist violence around the planet. Decades of corporate media slander and the continuation of the U.S. embargo has solidified the anti-Castro, anti-Cuba narrative in U.S. political discourse. The world sees Fidel in a completely different light. Not only does the UN reject the U.S. embargo, but Fidel's commemoration ceremony in Havana also included the participation of numerous global leaders such as the Presidents of Ecuador, South Africa, and Nicaragua, to name a few. Cuba's willingness to assist the struggle of oppressed people and resist imperialism is intimately connected to Fidel Castro's life work and leadership.

Fidel may be gone, but the struggle he helped lead is alive and well. Cuba remains in the cross hairs of U.S. imperialism. The socialist republic's achievements are in constant danger as long as U.S. imperialism continues to wield its wrecking ball all over the world. The left owes a debt of gratitude to Fidel, and not only because he and the Cuban people have protected Black revolutionaries such as Assata Shakur, Robert Williams, and Huey Newton from U.S. government persecution. Fidel has left a body of work that must be studied and applied to the current situation of the oppressed. His legacy is immortal because the struggle for liberation cannot be confined to a body or a moment. The struggle for a new humanity, a socialist humanity, is eternal.

Danny Haiphong is an Asian activist and political analyst in the Boston area.

—*Black Agenda Report*, December 6, 2016

http://blackagendareport.com/a_eulogy_for_fidel

Cuba

Where real human rights are the foundation of society

STATEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL NETWORK ON CUBA (NNOC)¹

The whole world reacted to the death of Cuba's historic leader Fidel Castro. For most of us there was sorrow; respect for a life well lived. The revolutionary process he unleashed created measurable improvements to the lives of many ordinary people on every continent.

But there was another reaction, too. Pres.-elect Donald Trump declared he wanted a "better deal," demanded that Cuba release political prisoners that don't actually exist and rolled out slanderous code words "dictator," "tyrant." In a little more than a month, the president-elect will lead a country where police kill Black and Latin people—men, women, children, transgender—with impunity. Yet he is quoted by the *Washington Post* saying that Fidel's legacy is the denial of human rights.

With International Human Rights Day around the corner, the National Network on Cuba will not let this slander go unanswered. Without going into all 30 articles of the Declaration adopted December 10, 1948, the first sentence of the preamble says that recognition of "the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all member of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

As winter begins to bite in the Northern Hemisphere, over 500,000 will be sleeping on U.S. streets, under bridges, families with children will be living in cars. Not in Cuba. One mural in Cuba says, "300 million children will sleep in the street tonight, not one of them is Cuban."

The average U.S. 2016 college graduate owes \$37,172 in student loans. Not in Cuba.

In the U.S. millions are being evicted from their homes because of sky rocketing rents and mortgages. Not in Cuba.

According to a Kaiser Family foundation survey, the average 2016 family insurance premium costs \$18,412 per year. In 2016, 83 percent of workers have a deductible—an amount that they have to pay themselves for medical care before insurance covers it—with an average of \$1,478. For the first time since 1999, more than half of workers must pay more than \$1000 in medical costs before insurance coverage begins. Not in Cuba.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Literacy in an April 2016 study, 14 percent or 32 million adults can't read in this country. Not in Cuba.

Trump openly advocates water boarding and other forms of torture. From the more than 800 U.S. military installations around the world people have been "renditioned" to torture sites. Since 2002, torture has been taking place in Cuba, BUT ONLY in the territory illegally occupied by the U.S. military base in Guantánamo.

We assert that the Cuban Revolution is an excellent example of the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights today. Cuba is a small island country, with development hampered by centuries of colonialism and slavery, and despite having to endure to this day an economic, financial and commercial blockade that has lasted for over 56 years—one designed to impose hunger and privation on its people, the island remains a bright example of humanity to the world.

The full resources of Cuba are used to develop each individual Cuban to their fullest potential. Universal health-care, free education through university, the right to employment, to housing—to dignity—is not only guaranteed but implemented.

Over \$4 billion was wasted this year on the presidential campaign in the U.S. Just imagine for a moment what that money could have been spent on in terms of social improvements. Meanwhile the people of Cuba enjoy free and fair elections untainted by financial influence. Every Cuban is registered to vote on their 16th birthday. Every vote is counted under the honest and watchful eyes of children. In addition to representation, the Cuban people are directly consulted about the direction of their society through community, union, women's, agricultural, youth and other

organizations. Their views are heeded. Transgender individuals have been elected to represent their area.

So when we hear about Human Rights Day on Saturday, December 10, remember the fundamental human rights enjoyed in Cuba where the 1959 Revolution converted military barracks into schools. One of them is the Latin American School of Medicine where youth from underserved communities around the world—including some from the U.S.—learn to be doctors for free, then go home to serve the people.

Yes, that is real human rights.
Co-Chairs, National Network on Cuba
www.nnoc.info
Alicia Jrapko
Banbose Shango
Cheryl LaBash
Greg Klave
Nalda Vigezzi

¹ Formerly the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban 5

Song of Protest

A poem for Fidel Castro

BY PABLO NERUDA

Fidel, Fidel, the people are grateful
for words in action and deeds that sing,
that is why I bring from far
a cup of my country's wine:
it is the blood of a subterranean people
that from the shadows reaches your throat,
they are miners who have lived for centuries
extracting fire from the frozen land.
They go beneath the sea for coal
but on returning they are like ghosts:
they grew accustomed to eternal night,
the working-day light was robbed from them,
nevertheless here is the cup
of so much suffering and distances:
the happiness of imprisoned men
possessed by darkness and illusions
who from the inside of mines perceive
the arrival of spring and its fragrances
because they know that Man is struggling
to reach the amplest clarity.
And Cuba is seen by the Southern miners,
the lonely sons of la pampa,
the shepherds of cold in Patagonia,
the fathers of tin and silver,
the ones who marry cordilleras
extract the copper from Chuquicamata,
men hidden in buses
in populations of pure nostalgia,
women of the fields and workshops,

children who cried away their childhoods:
this is the cup, take it, Fidel.
It is full of so much hope
that upon drinking you will know your victory
is like the aged wine of my country
made not by one man but by many men
and not by one grape but by many plants:
it is not one drop but many rivers:
not one captain but many battles.
And they support you because you represent
the collective honor of our long struggle,
and if Cuba were to fall we would all fall,
and we would come to lift her,
and if she blooms with flowers
she will flourish with our own nectar.
And if they dare touch Cuba's
forehead, by your hands liberated,
they will find people's fists,
we will take out our buried weapons:
blood and pride will come to rescue,
to defend our beloved Cuba.

Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) was a Chilean poet, diplomat and politician. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971 and served as a senator as a member of the Chilean Communist Party. During his life, he published almost forty volumes of poetry.

—Red Wedge, November 28, 2016

<http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/online-issue/poem-for-fidel-castro-song-of-protest>

In the Philippines: “They Are Slaughtering Us Like Animals”

BY DANIEL BEREHULAK

Inside President Rodrigo Duterte’s brutal antidrug campaign in the Philippines, Daniel Berehulak documented 57 homicide victims over 35 days. We present here the text of the article. The link to the online version including his photos and video is listed at the end of the article. —Socialist Viewpoint

You hear a murder scene before you see it: The desperate cries of a new widow. The piercing sirens of approaching police cars. The thud, thud, thud of the rain drumming on the pavement of a Manila alleyway—and on the back of Romeo Torres Fontanilla.

Tigas, as Mr. Fontanilla was known, was lying facedown in the street when I pulled up after 1:00 A.M. He was 37. Gunned down, witnesses said, by two unknown men on a motorbike. The downpour had washed his blood into the gutter.

The rain-soaked alley in the Pasay district of Manila was my 17th crime scene, on my 11th day in the Philippines capital. I had come to document the bloody and chaotic campaign against drugs that President Rodrigo Duterte began when he took office on June 30. Since then, about 2,000 people had been slain at the hands of the police alone.

I witnessed bloody scenes just about everywhere imaginable—on the sidewalk, on train tracks, in front of a girls’ school, outside 7-Eleven stores and a McDonald’s restaurant, across bedroom mattresses and living-room sofas. I watched as a woman in red peeked at one of those grisly sites through fingers held over her eyes, at once trying to protect herself and permit herself one last glance at a man killed in the middle of a busy road.

Not far from where Tigas was killed, I found Michael Araja, shown in the photo in the *New York Times*, dead in

front of a “sari sari,” what locals call the kiosks that sell basics in the slums. Neighbors told me that Mr. Araja, 29, had gone out to buy cigarettes and a drink for his wife, only to be shot dead by two men on a motorcycle, a tactic common enough to have earned its own nickname: riding in tandem.

In another neighborhood, Riverside, a bloodied Barbie doll lay next to the body of a 17-year-old girl who had been killed alongside her 21-year-old boyfriend.

“They are slaughtering us like animals,” said a bystander who was afraid to give his name.

I have worked in 60 countries, covered wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and spent much of 2014 living inside West Africa’s Ebola zone, a place gripped by fear and death. What I experienced in the Philippines felt like a new level of ruthlessness: police officers’ summarily shooting anyone suspected of dealing or even using drugs, vigilantes’ taking seriously Mr. Duterte’s call to “slaughter them all.”

He said in October, “You can expect 20,000 or 30,000 more.”

On Saturday, Mr. Duterte said that, in a telephone call the day before, President-elect Donald J. Trump had endorsed the brutal antidrug campaign and invited him to visit New York and Washington. “He said that, well, we are doing it as a sovereign nation, the right way,” Mr. Duterte said in a summary of the call released by his office.

Beyond those killed in official drug operations, the Philippine National Police have counted more than 3,500 unsolved homicides since July 1, turning much of the country into a macabre house of mourning.

Some bodies were found on the streets with their heads wrapped in

packing tape. Others were left with crude cardboard signs labeling victims as dealers or addicts. That is what happened with the two men in the video [see link to video at the end of the article], which was captured by a security camera outside Santa Catalina College, a private religious school for girls.

More than 35,600 people have been arrested in antidrug operations the government calls Project Tokhang. The name is derived from a phrase meaning, “knock and plead” in Cebuano, Mr. Duterte’s first language.

In affluent neighborhoods of gated communities and estates, there is, indeed, sometimes a polite knock on the door, an officer handing a pamphlet detailing the repercussions of drug use to the housekeeper who answers. In poorer districts, the police grab teenage boys and men off the street, run background checks, make arrests and sometimes shoot to kill.

Government forces have gone door to door to more than 3.57 million residences, according to the police. More than 727,600 drug users and 56,500 pushers have surrendered so far, the police say, overcrowding prisons. At the Quezon City Jail, inmates take turns sleeping in any available space, including a basketball court.

My nights in Manila would begin at 9:00 P.M. at the police district press office, where I joined a group of local reporters waiting for word of the latest killings. We would set off in convoys, like a train on rails, hazard lights flashing as we sped through red traffic lights.

I kept daily diaries and audio recordings of these overnight operations, working with Rica Concepcion, a Filipino reporter with 30 years of experience.

We joined the police on numerous stings. We also went on our own to the

places where people were killed or bodies were found. The relatives and neighbors we met in those places often told a very different story from what was recorded in official police accounts.

“Nanlaban” is what the police call a case when a suspect resists arrest and ends up dead. It means, “he fought it out.” That is what they said about Florjohn Cruz, 34, whose body was being carted away by a funeral home when I arrived at his home in the poor Caloocan neighborhood just before 11:00 P.M. one night.

His niece said they found a cardboard sign saying “Pusher at Adik Wag Tularan”—“Don’t be a pusher and an addict like him”—as they were cleaning Mr. Cruz’s blood from the floor near the family’s altar.

The police report said, “Suspect Cruz ran inside the house then pulled a firearm and successively shot the lawmen, prompting the same to return fire in order to prevent and repel Cruz’s unlawful aggression.”

His wife, Rita, told me, between pained cries, that Mr. Cruz had been fixing a transistor radio for his 71-year-old mother in the living room when armed men barged in and shot him dead.

The family said Mr. Cruz was not a drug dealer, only a user of shabu, as Filipinos call methamphetamine. He had surrendered months earlier, responding to Mr. Duterte’s call, for what was supposed to be a drug-treatment program. The police came for him anyway.

As my time in the Philippines wore on, the killings seemed to become more brazen. Police officers appeared to do little to hide their involvement in what were essentially extrajudicial executions. Nanlaban had become a dark joke.

“There is a new way of dying in the Philippines,” said Redentor C. Ulsano, the police superintendent in the Tondo district. He smiled and held his wrists

together in front of him, pretending to be handcuffed.

Mr. Cruz’s 16-year-old nephew, Eliam, and 18-year-old niece, Princess, said they had watched from a second-story porch as the plainclothes officers who had killed their uncle emerged from the house. Eliam and Princess said they heard the beep of a text message and watched as one of the men read it from his phone.

“Ginebra’s won,” he announced to the others, referring to Barangay Ginebra San Miguel, the nation’s most popular basketball team, which had been battling for the championship across town. The teenagers said the men celebrated the team’s victory as their uncle was carried out in a body bag.

Roel Scott, 13, is one of the boys at the spot where his uncle, Joselito Jumaquio, was slain by a mob of masked men. Mourners often place candles in the blood of the victim to honor them.

Roel said he was playing video games with Mr. Jumaquio, a pedicab driver who had also surrendered himself to the authorities, when 15 of the masked men descended quickly and silently over the shantytown called Pandacan.

Witnesses told us the men dragged Mr. Jumaquio down an alley and shouted at gathering neighbors to go back into their homes and turn the lights off. They heard a woman shout, “Nanlaban!” He’s fighting it out.

Two shots rang out. Then four more.

When it was quiet, the neighbors found the pedicab driver’s bloodied body—a gun and a plastic bag of shabu next to his handcuffed hands. The police report called it a “buy-bust operation.”

I also photographed wakes and funerals, a growing part of daily life under Mr. Duterte. Relatives and priests rarely mentioned the brutal causes of death.

Maria Mesa Deparine lost two sons in a single week in September. Both had turned themselves in to the police. Both were found dead under bridges.

Ms. Deparine said it took her three weeks to collect loans and donations totaling 50,000 pesos, about \$1,030, to pay for the burial of her baby, Aljon, who was 23. We went with her to the funeral home where she pleaded with the owners to reduce the fees for his brother, Danilo, 36.

Danilo’s body, on the floor, had already spent two weeks in the morgue, where the dead are stacked like firewood, with nothing separating them. The funeral directors agreed to a cut rate of 12,000 pesos, about \$240, for a one-day wake instead of the usual week.

Ms. Deparine left; unsure whether she could come up with the sum, or whether Danilo would end up in a mass grave with other victims of the president’s drug war.

The killing disrupts every aspect of life. Family members told me that Benjamin Visda, in the coffin, had stepped out of a family birthday party to grab something at a *sari sari* and was eating cake when eight men grabbed him. Within 20 minutes, his body had been dumped outside a police station.

The police called this, too, a buy-bust operation, and said that Mr. Visda, while handcuffed, tried to grab an officer’s gun—Nanlaban—so they shot him. A video, also taken from a security camera, shows him being loaded alive onto a motorcycle, sandwiched between two masked men.

The same night Florjohn Cruz was killed, we found ourselves a few streets away an hour-and-a-half later, at another home where a man had been murdered. It was raining that night, too.

We heard the wrenching screams of Nellie Diaz, the new widow, before we saw her crumpled over the body of her husband, Crisostomo, who was 51.

Mr. Diaz grew up in the neighborhood, and worked intermittently,

doing odd jobs. His wife said he was a user, not a dealer, and had turned himself in soon after Mr. Duterte's election. She still thought it unsafe for him to sleep at home, and told him to stay with relatives. But he missed his nine children, and had returned days before.

Mr. Diaz's eldest son, J.R., 19, said a man in a motorcycle helmet kicked in

the front door, followed by two others. The man in the helmet pointed a gun at Mr. Diaz, J.R. said; the second man pointed a gun at his 15-year-old brother, Jhon Rex. The third man held a piece of paper.

J.R. said the man in the helmet said, "Goodbye, my friend," before shooting his father in the chest. His body sank,

but the man shot him twice more, in the head and cheeks. The children said the three men were laughing as they left.

—*New York Times*, December 7, 2016

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/07/world/asia/rodrigo-duterte-philippines-drugs-killings.html?_r=0

Letter in Defense of Guadalupe Lizárraga

December 23, 2016

Dr. Raúl Cervantes Andrade
Procurador General de la República
La Procuraduría General de México
Paseo de la Reforma 211-213
Cuauhtémoc, Ciudad de México, C.P 6500
MEXICO

Dear Attorney General Cervantes Andrade,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, are writing to express our concern over the recent harassment of Ms. Guadalupe Lizárraga, an award-winning journalist based in Los Angeles, California, by agents of your office. These persons confronted Ms. Lizárraga during the proceedings of a human rights conference organized by the Frente Refundación at the Instituto de Investigaciones Culturales on the Universidad de Baja California campus in Mexicali in November. They subjected this much-respected reporter to questioning regarding her news stories—based on sound investigative journalism—on the false allegations of Sra. Maria Isabel Wallace Miranda that her son was kidnapped and murdered by six innocent individuals.

We believe that sending agents thousands of miles to interrogate Ms. Lizárraga constitutes an attack on freedom of the press and the public's right to know about the six defendants who have suffered physical torture and psy-

chological abuse while awaiting trial, jailed since 2006.

Rather than trying to intimidate and harass journalists like Ms. Lizárraga, your office should be taking seriously the unprecedented number of Mexican journalists who have been assassinated since President Felipe Calderón initiated the government's war on drugs in 2006. It is time you and your staff devoted the necessary resources to investigate and prosecute the criminals responsible for their deaths.

This escalating violence as well as the erosion of civil liberties, the blatant disregard for due process, the impunity for crimes committed by government officials, and the attacks on freedom of the press all undermine the pursuit of justice in your country.

Most glaringly, the case of the missing 43 Ayotzinapa teachers' college students remains unsolved after 27 long months of protests and global outrage. The subsequent cover-up has implicated President Enrique Peña Nieto and points to corruption at the highest level of the Mexican government. The families of these students and the world deserve a conclusive investigation by your office of this crime, just as Mexican journalists and the Mexican public deserve access to a free press in which those who cover such stories are not afraid for their lives.

We call on you to end the harassment of Ms. Lizárraga, whom we will

continue to defend in the context of building international support for freedom of the press in Mexico.

Sincerely,

Stephen Durham, International Secretary, Freedom Socialist Party (FSP), U.S.A. Section, New York City; Frederick W. Hyde, Administrative Law Judge (Retired),* Seattle, Washington; Jim Lafferty, Executive Director Emeritus, National Lawyers Guild, Los Angeles, California; Daniel Vila, Program Director, "La Voz Latina", WBAI-99.5FM and President Manhattan Greens*, New York City; David Bertet, President of Board of Directors, Canadian Association for Rights and Truth, Montreal, Canada; Partido Obrero Socialista (POS), México; Núcleo por un Partido Obrero Revolucionario Internacionalista (NUPORI), República Dominicana; Juan Marino, Tendencia Piquetera Revolucionaria (TPR), Argentina; Partido Causa Operário (PCO), Brazil; Radical Women, USA Section; Debbie Brennen, Organizer, Radical Women, Australia Section, Melbourne, Australia; Alison Thorne, Organizer, Freedom Socialist Party, Australia Section, Melbourne, Australia, Socialist Action, San Francisco, California, *Socialist Viewpoint*, San Francisco, California; YoSoy132 NY, New York City; Ayotzinapa NY, New York City; Ayotzinapa New York/Connecticut; Antonio Flores Quin, Community Organizer with Orgulho P'urhepecha*, Seattle, Washington; Carole Seligman, Retired Teacher, California Teachers Association-South San Francisco Chapter* and Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal*, San Francisco, California; Bob Price, American Federation of Teachers, Local 2121* and San Francisco Labor Council*, San Francisco, California

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— *Freedom Hall*, 113 West 128th Street, New York, NY 10027

Syria and the Antiwar Tradition

BY DAVID BUSH

November 3, 2016—There is major disorientation on the left in many Western countries when it comes to Syria and about how antiwar activists should respond to events on the ground in Syria and Iraq. The highly complex nature of the Syrian war involving a multitude of foreign states and non-state actors would, in the best of times, present the left with a real challenge to find political clarity. The fact that this is occurring precisely when the antiwar movement in countries like Canada and the United States are relatively weak only adds to the confusion. The way in which the debate about the Syrian war has been framed and conducted by large parts of the left has been unhelpful to say the least. Some have taken a pro-Assad/pro-Russia anti-imperialist line. This position views the popular uprising against Bashar al-Assad as reactionary and driven by U.S. imperialism.

Others frame the debate about the need to support the revolution against ISIS and the Assad regime (or lament the lack of support for the rebels from U.S. imperialism as Gilbert Achcar does.) Sometimes this takes on tangible support for the People's Protection Units (YPG)—an armed leftist/feminist Kurdish independence force—or supporting this or that force within the array of groups that make up the anti-Assad/anti-ISIS opposition. There are of course a variety of positions within this frame: some call for active intervention by the West to stop massacres by Assad, others call for arming the rebels or more humanitarian aid, while others equally condemn all sides.

The conflict spreads

The problem with the pro-Assad anti-imperialism position, sometimes referred to as “campist” (a line of think-

ing that sees the world as divided up into pro and anti-imperial blocs or nations) is obvious. Just because a regime is opposed to American imperialism does not mean all its actions should be reflexively defended. Assad's regime has too often collaborated with the American state, taken aim at crushing popular movements advocating democracy and workers' power. There is no doubt his regime has committed war crimes and helped facilitate the rise of ISIS and other reactionary Islamic groups (his regime released key radical Islamist leaders from prison and militarily laid off ISIS and Al Nusra—or as it is called now Jabhat Fateh al-Sham—in a bid to weaken other sections of the opposition.)

However, many on the left who reject this campist perspective have themselves offered confusing and at times dangerous perspectives. For example, it would be a point of absurdity to say the Syrian revolution as it was in 2011/2012 looks anything like the quagmire that exists today. There is not simply a four-front war going between Assad's regime, ISIS, the YPG and the revolutionary rebels. The conflict in Syria has spread throughout the region. The forces on the ground in Iraq and Syria are way more fractured and the footprints of world powers and even regional powers are everywhere. The anti-Assad uprising has collapsed into severe fragmentation, often radicalizing in reactionary directions, and any coherence that may have existed in 2011/2012 has been drowned in blood.

The point here is not to outline exactly what is happening on the ground in Syria, but to note that the way in which sections of the international left are framing this in ways that are completely off the mark in terms a guiding an appropriate response at home.

The left's antiwar roots

An antiwar movement's rejection of imperial intervention can never be contingent upon an identification with the political aims of those subjected to imperialism.

Within the Second International prior to the First World War, there were fierce debates in the early years about the nature of colonialism, with some like Eduard Bernstein, arguing that imperial projects undertaken by certain nations, like Britain, were actually progressive because they supposedly expanded democratic and workers' rights. Bernstein and other socialists, such as August Bebel and Gustav Noske, argued that it was possible to take a position in support of “progressive” colonization.

These arguments were rejected by others in the Second International. They argued that having a socialist colonial policy was a contradiction in terms as the idea that the project of human liberation, socialism, could have anything to do with the domination and control of other peoples was absurd. War and colonialism were not just seen as morally wrong, but as intractable barriers to achieving socialism. These positions carried the day and the Second International passed motions in 1907, 1910, and 1914 that condemned militarism and war. The 1907 Stuttgart resolution laid out clearly why socialists must oppose war:

“Wars are favored by the national prejudices which are systematically cultivated among civilized peoples in the interest of the ruling classes for the purpose of distracting the proletarian masses from their own class tasks as well as from their duties of international solidarity.

“Wars, therefore, are part of the very nature of capitalism; they will cease only when the capitalist system

is abolished or when the enormous sacrifices in men and money required by the advance in military technique and the indignation called forth by armaments, drive the peoples to abolish this system.

“For this reason, the proletariat, which contributes most of the soldiers and makes most of the material sacrifices is a natural opponent of war which contradicts its highest goal—the creation of an economic order on a Socialist basis which will bring about the solidarity of all peoples.”

The Second International of course failed in its response to the outbreak of war in Europe in part because it fudged the question of how best to apply antiwar principles. Most sections of the international sided with their own ruling class. They chose to blame the start of the war and its sheer barbarism on other national governments. The same failures permeated not just the socialist movement but that of anarchists and anti-imperialist liberals as well.

The Zimmerwald conference, the dissident rump of the Second International that opposed the war in 1914, provided an alternative orientation to how antiwar activism should understand wars. For the Bolsheviks, who were part of the Zimmerwald Left, this meant turning imperial war into a civil war at home. Others at Zimmerwald argued for calling for immediate peace. The Zimmerwald Left put forth an argument stemming from the Second International that the correct orientation of each national group was to oppose its own ruling class's drive to war.

This was best summed up by Karl Liebknecht, the only member of the German Reichstag to vote against the war in 1914, in his pamphlet *The Main Enemy is at Home!*:

“The main enemy of the German people is in Germany: German imperialism, the German war party, German secret diplomacy. This enemy at home must be fought by

the German people in a political struggle, cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists.”

The lessons from the failure of the Second International, the Zimmerwald Left and people like Karl Liebknecht have been fundamental to building successful antiwar movements in places like Canada, the United States and Great Britain.

The enemy is at home

Ashley Smith in a recent series of articles on Syria¹ argues that the role of the U.S. left is to win over people to a genuine anti-imperialism that opposes Russia and U.S. imperialism equally, while also rejecting the Assad regime. Smith's main focus seems to be on critiquing other leftists, Russia, and Assad and not on a strategy for building a broad working class movement at home that aims to stop U.S. imperialism.

Corey Oakley writing about how Western leftists should orient to the Syrian war list those who are most culpable for the carnage in order: Assad, Iran, Russia and the West. Oakley uses this ordering to show that the main enemy is actually not at home stating, “If Britain were at war with Russia, ‘the main enemy is at home’ would be a fine slogan for the UK left to raise... In the Syrian context, though, all it does is say to those resisting Assad: ‘Your enemy is not our enemy. Because you are not fighting our government, your plight is not our concern.’”

Oakley's argument is confused on a number of points. The slogan of the main enemy at home does not say we don't care about your plight, rather it says our responsibility to internationalism is to stop the imperialism of our own ruling class, precisely because no one else will do it. To frame opposition to war in the abstract—the main enemy is whoever is causing the most amount of death—is actually to shirk the political responsibility for what you can effectively alter, your own government's actions.

Both Smith and Oakley ultimately confuse the act of building a solidarity movement with the act of building an antiwar movement. The former is about bringing awareness and material support to a group of people. The latter is about stopping your own government's drive to war. Both are acts of solidarity, but they differ in focus and strategy.

Resisting war and militarism is not just a moral duty but necessary if socialists want to build working-class power. But it is not enough to simply reject war in the abstract. A definitive strategy must be crafted and implemented. To do so without falling into traps of nationalism and racism requires that workers build movements in their own countries against wars fought by their own ruling class.

Speaking out on crimes perpetrated elsewhere is important but prioritizing the fight at home is key, as Chomsky explains:

“My own concern is primarily the terror and violence carried out by my own state, for two reasons. For one thing, because it happens to be the larger component of international violence. But also for a much more important reason than that: namely, I can do something about it. So even if the U.S. was responsible for two percent of the violence in the world instead of the majority of it, it would be that two percent I would be primarily responsible for. And that is a simple ethical judgment. That is, the ethical value of one's actions depends on their anticipated and predictable consequences. It is very easy to denounce the atrocities of someone else. That has about as much ethical value as denouncing atrocities that took place in the 18th century.”

A correct antiwar perspective is not just a moral condemnation of war, but a strategic orientation about how to best resist the drive to imperialism in the given context.

False historical precedence

Some argue, David Graeber and Hilary Benn come immediately to

mind, that the situation in Syria mirrors Spain in 1936. For them ISIS equals fascism and the duty of the left is to advocate for our ruling class to militarily support the smashing of this fascist threat, this sometimes is broadened to include Assad's forces. The operational conclusion of this position is supporting a no fly zone, arming rebel forces, and military collaboration between Western forces and rebels.

The problems with this argument are manifold. ISIS is a product of the American invasion and occupation of Iraq. The generations of Western imperialism in the region have laid the basis for the entire mess that is the Syrian war. More Western intervention is not just unlikely to solve the issues, it is almost assuredly going to make everything much worse. The anti-Assad forces have degenerated from a popular rebellion into a quagmire of political military forces that in no way resemble the array of forces in revolutionary Spain.

The actual history of the Spanish Civil War and the revolution also has little in common with the situation in Syria. The international left supported their comrades on the ground resisting Franco and fascism by raising funds and organizing volunteers for fighting. The leftist response in Spain and abroad was not to call for British and French intervention, but for those forces to ease the blockade, which was aimed at suffocating the revolutionary forces in Spain (for instance Britain and France went so far as protecting Franco's naval fleet.)

If the British and French intervened it would have not resulted in a victory for Spanish workers, more likely it would have meant an even speedier destruction of the revolution.

What about Russia?

Workers, the left, and socialists should be horrified by and condemn imperial adventures and war crimes committed elsewhere on the globe. So when the Russians and the Syrian gov-

ernment commit war crimes the left should not feel the need to minimize them or be silent. But that is a different orientation than prioritizing efforts to stop Russian imperialism when you live in America, the UK or Canada. Each of these countries' political and economic elites are all too eager to denounce Vladimir Putin and ratchet up the tensions with Russia. In the last number of years there has been a marked increase in vitriol directed at Russia by Western leaders.

The media has been in overdrive working to paint Russian President Putin as enemy number one (just look at the cover of last week's *Economist*.) War crimes committed by Russian forces in Eastern Aleppo get top coverage, while the media has been next to silent about crimes committed by Western-backed forces in Iraq. Some on the left mirror this line by condemning Russia's role in Aleppo while staying silent about bombings in Yemen and Mosul. This is nothing short of a criminal betrayal of international solidarity and provides political cover for the American ruling class.

All the while those in the UK and the United States opposing the drive for war have been painted as Assad/Putin apologists (even *WikiLeaks* is being painted as pro-Putin for leaking Clinton campaign emails.)

This has led to massive disorientation on the left. Some on the left have taken to denouncing figures like Jeremy Corbyn and groups like the Stop the War Coalition in Great Britain for not backing intervention to stop Russian bombing. This disorientation also existed around Libya, where people called for a "humanitarian" intervention to stop Gaddafi's drive to Benghazi. However, the NATO led intervention has left absolute ruin in that country, just as the Iraq war that started 13 years ago continues in another form.

When the left in the West prioritizes a perspective that the main enemy is

Russia, this all too easily leads down the road of bolstering nationalism and the rightwing. It creates the conditions for further imperial adventures and even opens the door to military confrontation with Russia.

There are some on the left (as well as on the right such as Boris Johnson) who argue that key now is to protest outside Russian embassies. But given the heightened tensions and renewed anti-Moscow bent in the U.S., UK and Canada, what positive outcome would that have? Can we seriously argue that Western leftists have the ability to stop Russian bombs? Protests outside the Russian embassy would surely be used by the right to increase the drive to war, not lessen the crimes committed. They would also play into Putin's hand and make it harder for Russians to build an anti-war movement linked to those in the West.

Uniting around "No War"

In Canada, the focus should be on ensuring the Liberals do not reengage with airstrikes in Syria. It also means demanding the troops be withdrawn from the Middle East and from the Ukraine and Eastern Europe, while also advocating for more refugees to be taken in and stopping Canada's escalating arms trade. In the USA, this means focusing on stopping American involvement (ending the direct bombing in all the countries, pulling out troops, closing bases and stopping the





funding of armed groups.) In Russia and Turkey this means supporting those on the ground calling for the end of military engagement in the region.

To be able to build up this perspective does not require political uniformity of those advocating a non-interventionist position. A simple application of a united front principle—all those who advocate for ending the involvement of your own ruling classes are welcome. Obviously major disagreements beyond that narrow political demand exist, but those should be fought separately.

This was precisely how the antiwar movement was built around the Vietnam and Iraq wars. In the run-up to the Iraq war, the rightwing and liberal media tried to paint the anti-war movement as a group of people uncaring or willfully unaware of Saddam's brutal crimes. People in the movement were routinely called Baathist apologists. Despite these routine slanders a perspective that focused on uniting around opposing the war, not on any other questions, allowed for mass participation in the movement. The terms of the movement were simple: do you

oppose the war? If yes, then let's join forces on that question and debate other political perspectives along the way (this was also the same formula that anti-war movement adopted during the Vietnam war.) What has been lost in the debate around the war in Syria is precisely this perspective.

Imperial involvement always has some sort of humanitarian justification whether that be protecting democracy and the free world in Vietnam or stopping a bloodthirsty tyrant with WMD's in Iraq. Those on the left who advocate

for selective intervention for "humanitarian" reasons fail to realize they don't direct state policy or war aims—those who put the troops in the field and conduct war have very different reasons for doing so. The drive to war has its own logic and aims, which are very much colored by the needs of capitalism and the interests of the economic and political elites. The left's call for intervention only provides political cover for the ruling class.

The antiwar movement has drifted far away from the ABC's of rejecting militarism and imperialism. However confusing and complex the situation is in Iraq and Syria the lessons and traditions of the antiwar movement still provide a path to political clarity and a useful strategic orientation for the left.

David Bush is an editor at RankandFile.ca.

—*The Bulletin*, November 3, 2016

<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1324.php#continue>

1 *Socialist Viewpoint*, Vol. 16, No. 6 "Anti-Imperialism and the Syrian Revolution," by Ashley Smith

http://www.socialistviewpoint.org/novdec_16/novdec_16_13.html



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The Western Left and the Syrian War

BY COREY OAKLEY

The Syrian war is not just a tragedy. It is a crime of immense proportions. And it is clear as day who is culpable.

First, the Assad regime, which in 2011 met the demands of a protest movement for social justice and democratization with bullets and torture cells, and when that failed, and protesters began to call for Bashar al Assad's overthrow, decided there was no price in blood it would not pay to stay in power.

Second, the Iranian regime, which, as the rebellion grew and the resources of the regime were exhausted in the face of a nationwide uprising, deployed its own military forces and proxy militias to keep the government in power and prolong the war.

Third, Russia. While Putin backed Assad from the outset, it was only in September last year that Russia, fearful the regime was on the brink of collapse, intervened decisively, unleashing the terrible power of its air force on rebel-held cities such as Aleppo. John Kerry's assertion that the Russian plan for Aleppo is modeled on its campaign in Grozny in 1999, when Russian forces laid waste to the entire city in order to wrest it from rebel hands, is likely to be a correct, if hypocritical, assessment.

Western imperialism

Then there is the West. It deserves its share of the blame too, but not for the reasons many claim. The predominant narrative on the left is that the U.S. and its allies have pursued a strategy of "regime change" in Syria, and are responsible for fuelling the resistance to Assad.

In fact, the opposite is true. Despite expressing, at various times, sympathy for rebels and hostility to Assad, the U.S. has at almost every stage hindered efforts to overthrow the regime.

CIA officers in Turkey, nominally in place to assist arms supply, in many cases in fact prevented the flow of weapons, particularly heavy weapons, to rebel forces. U.S. and Israeli pressure has been key to the ongoing refusal of U.S. ally Saudi Arabia to provide crucial anti-aircraft weapons to the opposition.

While there are significant elements in the U.S. security establishment who argue it is in the strategic interests of the U.S. to support the overthrow of Assad, the prevailing view thus far, and the actual policy pursued by the Obama administration, has accepted the need to keep the regime in place.

After the September ceasefire collapsed, there was renewed talk that the long-enforced U.S. ban on the supply of significant numbers of Saudi surface-to-air missiles to Syrian rebels would be lifted. But by mid-October it was clear that these plans had yet again been shelved.

This has been the recurring pattern of the war. While Russia has intervened decisively in defense of the Assad regime, U.S. promises of "support" for rebels have repeatedly failed to materialize or been so conditional (for example, insisting that in exchange for weapons, rebel groups agree to fight only ISIS, rather than Assad's forces) as to be of no actual help to the struggle against the regime.

This seeming paralysis is not simply the result of political ineptitude. It reflects the fact that while Putin has a clear policy of defending the regime as a means to entrench Russian influence in Syria, the U.S. has no clear strategic orientation. It has no particular love for Assad, especially as the regime's ties with Russia have tightened over the course of the war. But the U.S. is equally hostile to a decisive victory for the revolutionary forces, precisely

because—counter to what many in the pro-Assad camp assert—there is scant evidence that the removal of the regime would serve U.S. interests.

The responsibilities of the Western left

The divisions in the Western left over what attitude to take to the Syrian war have been bitter and wide-ranging. At the core of the problem has been a hesitancy by many on the left, or in some cases outright refusal, to accept the legitimacy of the revolutionary movement that broke out in 2011.

At the extreme end of this are those like University of Sydney academic Tim Anderson, who consider the Assad regime to be a secular, socialist government that is part of the "axis of resistance" to U.S. imperialism and Zionism, and therefore to be defended at all costs. For them, the entire revolution was a CIA plot from day one, and the well-documented crimes of the regime are all fabrications concocted by imperialists and their lackeys.

Anderson restated his longstanding position in a recent interview, arguing that "The war on Syria has never been a civil war, although there has always been a small minority of Syrians who have engaged in the war, betraying their country to NATO and the Persian Gulf monarchies. The key forces against Syria since 2011 have been Washington and its regional allies, the Saudis, Qatar, Turkey and Israel, with support from some others including Jordan, Canada, the UK and France."

According to Anderson, the crimes of the regime are "false flag" operations—lies concocted by the opposition. The 2013 Sarin gas attack in Ghouta, which killed as many as 1,500 people, was, according to him and his fellow conspiracy theorists, in fact carried out

by the opposition to win international sympathy. Anderson and his ilk also ignore the long history of collaboration of the Assad regime (both father and son) with Israel to keep the peace, as well as Bashar's collaboration with George W. Bush during the "war on terror," during which Syria was one of the key destinations for "rendition," *i.e.*, where the U.S. sent its prisoners to be tortured.

But much more common than apologists for Assad are those on the left who acknowledge some or many of the crimes of the regime but nonetheless think that the U.S. is still the most culpable party in the Syrian conflict, and/or that the primary duty of leftists in the West is to oppose our own governments over Syria.

At one extreme of this category are journalists like Patrick Cockburn, Seymour Hersh and Robert Fisk. These people repeat the talking points of the regime while acknowledging some of its worst atrocities. Cockburn, for example, argues that the West should form a military alliance with Assad and his murderous forces to fight jihadi extremism.

At the other end of this spectrum are those like the leaders of the UK Stop the War Coalition, who oppose Russian bombing but "do not take sides or have one position on the internal conflict" and maintain that the focus of the Western left must be on opposing Western imperialism.

The Stop the War stance is often justified with reference to the German socialist Karl Liebknecht, an iconic hero of the revolutionary movement that opposed World War One, who coined the antiwar slogan "the main enemy is at home."

The problem—as is often the case when enlisting quotations from the dead for use in contemporary debates—is one of context. When Liebknecht said that his enemy was his own government and not their imperial rivals, it was not just an assertion of the conflict of interest between German workers

and their rulers, but also a powerful statement of solidarity with the workers of Russia, Britain, and the other powers against whom Germany was waging war. Furthermore, when revolution against the Tsar broke out in Russia in 1917, Liebknecht enthusiastically supported it, even though the overthrow of the Tsar was in the narrow short-term interests of the German state.

How does this apply today? If Britain were at war with Russia, "the main enemy is at home" would be a fine slogan for the UK left to raise, one that would not only expose the conflicting class interests in British society but also promote internationalist sentiments among Russian workers and help them resist the jingoistic propaganda of their own rulers. In the Syrian context, though, all it does is say to those resisting Assad: "Your enemy is not our enemy. Because you are not fighting our government, your plight is not our concern."

One way around this, of course, would be to establish that Western governments like the UK, the U.S. and Australia are in fact the main immediate enemy of the Syrian people. The problem is that this is palpably untrue. There is simply no argument that the U.S. is inflicting death and destruction on Syria on anything like the scale of the Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian allies. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the death of 9,524 people, 42 percent of them civilians, at the hand of Russian airstrikes between September 30, 2015 and October 7, 2016.

Chris Woods from the monitoring group Airwars says, "the Russians' death rate probably outpaces the coalition by a rate of eight to one." And that is leaving aside entirely the fact that the regime the Russians are propping up is the responsible for the overwhelming majority of deaths in Syria since 2011.

There is no doubt that the U.S. is responsible for many atrocities in

Syria—according to Airwars, the U.S.-led coalition has caused around 900 civilian deaths over 26 months of bombing. But the logic of the so-called "anti-imperialist" position is constantly to play up the atrocities of Western forces and downplay the much greater level of death and destruction caused by the regime and its allies, which the overwhelming majority of Syrians consider to be their main enemy.

Given the difficulties in claiming Western powers are right now a greater threat to the Syrian people than the Russian air force, the other approach adopted by defenders of the "anti-imperialist" position is to put forward analyses of what the Western powers want to do in the future (*i.e.*, invade, start a war with Assad/Russia *etc.*) that not only overstate the potential for such developments, but downplay the indisputably real imperial intervention in Syria that is taking place right now.

In recent weeks, the position of the antiwar left in Britain has been considerably complicated by a chauvinist campaign of anti-Russian hysteria launched by a section of the Tory party, backed by opponents of Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn on the right of his party. This follows an earlier campaign in favour of British intervention that the Labor right and the Tories used to try to undermine Corbyn's leadership.

The most obscene element of this latest campaign was the call by Tory foreign minister Boris Johnson for antiwar protests outside the Russian embassy. The Stop the War Coalition was attacked in parliament and the media for refusing to back such a protest.

Stop the War was right to say that the call by Tories and Blairites for "antiwar" protests were in fact calls for "start the war" mobilisations for the UK to start a military conflict with Russia. But Stop the War's insistence on prioritising opposition to UK and other Western imperialist wars left it unable to convincingly make the obvi-

ous argument against Johnson—that of hypocrisy.

Chris Nineham, the Stop the War representative who appeared in a widely shared interview on the BBC, epitomised the problem. Challenged as to why Stop the War was not prepared to protest against the monstrous crime of Russia's blitzkrieg of Aleppo, he was reduced to arguing that it was because the Russians wouldn't pay any attention to what Stop the War said.

Much more effective was Eamonn McCann, the People Not Profit member in the Northern Ireland Assembly. He denounced the Russian war on Syria in blistering terms, before turning his attention to the sickening hypocrisy of those in the media and political establishment who cried crocodile tears over Aleppo, but then cheered on U.S. interventions in Iraq and Yemen, and provided weaponry and political support to reactionary dictatorships like the Saudi monarchy that are neck-deep in the counter-revolutionary wars being waged across the region.

There is no doubting the need to make the case against Western imperialism in the Middle East. The U.S.-backed assault on Mosul, Iraq, in which a ferocious torrent of U.S. and allied air power will rain death on a city filled with civilians, to support the military campaign of sectarian Shiite forces just as murderous as ISIS, is already in motion, with little in the way of opposition in Western capitals. And if Hillary Clinton wins the U.S. presidential elections, as is almost certain, there is every likelihood of a new period of aggressive U.S. militarism.

But the left cannot convincingly make the case against Western imperial wars if it is ambivalent in the face of militarism of the non-Western variety. More importantly, the left cannot build a movement in solidarity with struggles in the Arab world if its criterion for supporting progressive struggles or opposing reaction with conviction is

based on the involvement or otherwise of Western governments.

The problem with universalizing Syria

Over the last few years, a loose body of activists and writers has emerged in and around the English-speaking left who are determined to pursue the case for solidarity with the Syrian revolution and combat the arguments that have marginalised Syrian solidarity in the West.

This has been a positive and important development. But, particularly in the last year, lines of argument have developed within this camp that are harmful not just to the left in general, but also to the cause of solidarity with the Syrian revolution.

First among these has been the contention that the Syrian revolution is the dividing line of modern politics, against which all else must be judged. It is not in dispute that the Syrian revolution is of crucial importance not just for Syrians, but for the future of the Arab revolution more broadly and even for the international left as a whole. Michael Karadjis, the most prolific defender of the Syrian revolution on the Australian left, has argued that the Syrian revolution is the defining struggle of our time. He may be right. But that does not mean (and Karadjis does not assert) that every struggle can be seen through the prism of the Syrian debates.

That view is, unfortunately, what has taken hold in a number of cases. For example, some supporters of the Syrian revolution have backed Hillary Clinton and opposed Greens candidate Jill Stein (and in some cases previously, Bernie Sanders) on the basis that Clinton has expressed opposition to the Assad regime and has not adopted the prevailing anti-interventionist view of the U.S. left expressed by Stein and Sanders.

For example Clay Claiborne, on his Linux Beach blog which contains many excellent articles defending the Syrian

revolution, writes that “Not only is Hillary Clinton's position far more sympathetic [than Jill Stein] to the Syrian people and their plight, as a purely practical political matter, she is correct to embrace the reality that any solution that does not involve the overthrow of the Assad regime can never succeed in bringing peace to Syria.”

This is an extreme case of missing the wood for the trees. Clinton is a darling of the neo-conservative wing of the U.S. military establishment. She advocates an aggressive U.S. militarism of the kind that destroyed Iraq and, incidentally, forged an alliance with Bashar al-Assad during the war on terror. Her hyper-imperialist politics have nothing to do with solidarity with the struggle for democracy of the Syrian people.

As for Stein and Sanders, it is true that some of their statements reflect talking points that are used by the Assad regime. But this is, for the most part, simply a reflection of the consensus on the U.S. antiwar left.

U.S. leftist writer Louis Proyect, in a useful article, suggests considering the position of the Greens in a similar way to that of the U.S. Communist Party in the 1930s, at the time of the Moscow Trials. While the U.S. Communist Party was thoroughly Stalinist, it would nonetheless have been wrong for the anti-Stalinist left to reduce the Communist Party to its Stalinism. On the one hand, the Communists defended unspeakable atrocities of the Stalin regime; on the other hand, in the U.S. context, they were an important part of the struggle against the bosses and against the ruling class. Their support for Stalinism could not be written off, but nor could their role in the domestic class struggle.

However much you think the Syrian revolution is the defining debate in world politics today, it is hard to argue it is more important than the question of Stalinism was to the left in 1937. And yet the anti-Stalinist elements of

the revolutionary left then—or some of them, at least—found a balance between the necessity of a relentless struggle against Stalinism and the need to find unity with those who wanted to fight the ruling class and their parties in particular countries.

The same argument applies to those in the UK who denounce Jeremy Corbyn because of his association with Stop the War (for example Sam Hamad, who declared himself “completely unmoved” by the recent Labor leadership challenge). Whatever you say about Stop the War’s approach to Syria, the fact that there is now a leader of the Labor Party associated with the organization responsible for the millions-strong demonstrations against the then Labor prime minister, Tony Blair, is of enormous significance.

It is true that it would have been better if Corbyn had made stronger statements in relation to the Syrian war, but the fact that he did not do so reflects a failing of the left in general, not primarily of him. What is significant is that we have a Labor leader aligned with the antiwar movement. The challenge in that context is to change the attitude of the antiwar movement to Syria, not to denounce the first Labor leader in generations, if not ever, to align himself with those resisting British imperialism.

Calls for Western intervention

From the beginning of the Syrian revolution, there have been those who denounced calls from within Syria for military aid from the U.S. or Arab states and seen them as proof of a CIA plot. I argued against this in 2012, writing: “Is it wrong for the Syrian revolutionaries to demand, and where possible accept, weapons from imperialists, the imperialists’ allies, or anyone else? Of course not. They have every right to do whatever it takes to defend themselves from the horrifying apparatus of Assad’s state.”

The fact that the U.S. has provided next to no weaponry to the rebel forces, and has actively prevented them from getting the heavy weapons they need from other sources, is one of the reasons the regime is still in place.

But it is one thing to demand the U.S. end what is effectively a weapons blockade against the Syrian rebels. It is quite another to demand, as some supporters of the Syrian revolution do, that the U.S. or the UK establish a no-fly zone that would bring them into military conflict with Russia and potentially spark a much broader war. Such calls are understandable in view of the horror of the Russian/Assadist onslaught, but they are wrong.

If the U.S. did shift policy and consider such action, it would not be

directed at saving lives in Aleppo or elsewhere. Instead it would represent a major attempt to reassert U.S. imperial might in a region where U.S. power has been considerably diminished since the Iraq war. Direct U.S. military involvement would be a disaster for the people of Syria and for the revolution. The U.S. is no more interested in democracy or social justice than Russia, as its previous close collaboration with the Assad regime attests.

The future

Internationally, the antiwar movement is at a low ebb. So too is international solidarity with what remains of the Arab revolutions. Stop the War in Britain is rightly proud that it has kept an antiwar movement alive when so many others—including us in Australia—have failed to do so. But the truth is that the vital energizing power of the antiwar movements born of the 2003 Iraq war subsided a long time ago. The anti-imperialist left has struggled ever since, no more so than in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, which tore apart the old formulas that put imperialist intrigue at the center of politics and ignored the potential of the Arab people to be the agents of their own destiny.

For the left to be relevant in the future, we need to solidarize with movements of the oppressed in the Arab world (and beyond,) and at the same time form the alliances necessary in the West to take on the oligarchs that rule our countries for the one percent. The old “anti-imperialism” that targeted only the West will not do. And neither will a politics that subordinates domestic questions in the West to litmus tests of international politics, or allows hostility to Russia to turn into accommodation with Western imperialism.

—Red Flag, October 27, 2016

<https://redflag.org.au/node/5559>



Lead Poisoning in U.S. Cities

Three-thousand U.S. cities have lead poisoning rates higher than Flint's

By TELESUR

As news of criminal charges against the architects of the poisoning of Flint's water system broke on Tuesday, December 20, 2016 a new report shows that almost 3,000 communities across the U.S. have lead poisoning rates higher than the beleaguered Michigan city, reflecting the devastating impacts of 40 years of neo-liberal neglect.

The *Reuters* report, called "Off The Charts," found 3,000 areas "with recently recorded lead poisoning rates at least double those in Flint during the peak of that city's contamination crisis," with public health records in a third of those communities showing rates at least four times higher.

While the Flint crisis was created by the criminal decision of a Republican appointed city manager to switch that city's water source to one known to pose a threat to public safety, the lead poisoning crisis in these other cities appears to be the result of a bipartisan toxic neoliberal mix of neglected public infrastructure, lack of enforcement of building regulations, and decreased funding for public health agencies.

The report shows that despite initially promising attempts in the late 1970s to not only ban lead-based paints, but clean up housing, plumbing, and playgrounds that used them, funding for those infrastructure programs soon dried up, leaving thousands of children vulnerable to the highly toxic substance.

The report suggests the problem is particularly dire in the impoverished de-industrialized heartland of the Midwest, where racialized poverty remains a key indicator of which communities are at higher risk.

For example, in one East Cleveland, Ohio neighborhood, where almost 50

percent of the residents live in poverty, "nearly half of kids tested in the last decade had elevated lead levels." Similarly, in 49 different communities in Pennsylvania, the former steel capital of the U.S., "at least 40 percent of children tested had high lead levels."

The effects of elevated lead levels are particularly devastating on young children, with the poison affecting brain development, something which the study says has been exacerbated by the underfunding of public health programs which could help diagnose and treat children in the early stages.

Indeed in Indiana, where Vice President-elect Mike Pence was governor, a successful testing program has all but ended because "the funding dried up," according to former public health program director Sue Taylor.

The *Reuters* report highlighted the "vicious cycle" of lead poisoning,

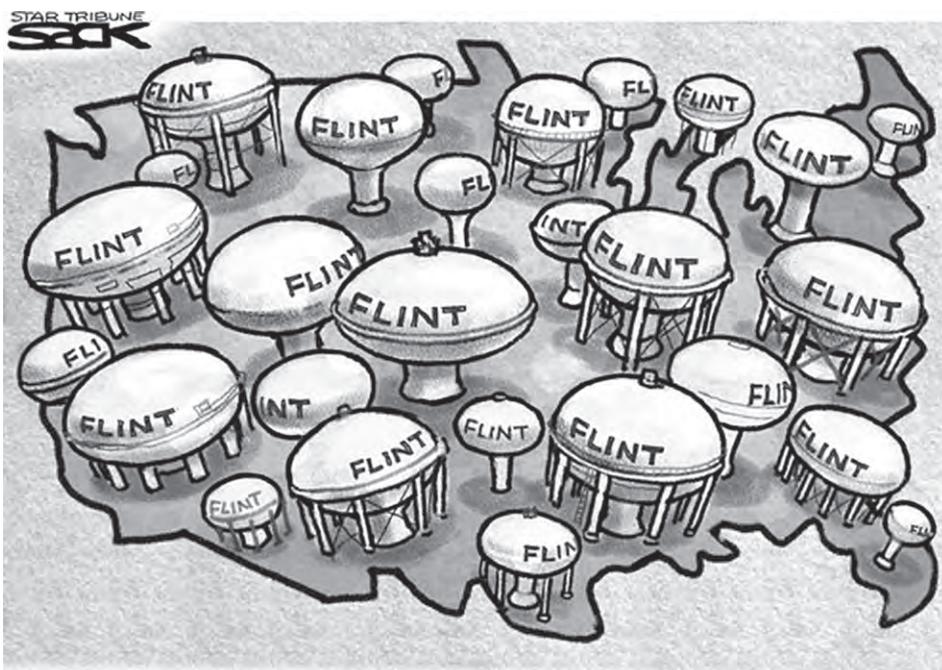
where "cognitive deficits breed poor school performance, high dropout rates, few job opportunities, and brushes with the law."

Indeed the report revealed a direct connection between lead poisoning caused by lack of enforcement of building standards, and one of the most high-profile police murders in recent years.

Little known to many, before Freddie Gray was murdered by Baltimore police in 2015, he and his family won an out of court settlement against their landlord who had failed to clean up the lead contamination in their building. Court filings in that case revealed that Gray suffered from health problems directly related to lead exposure.

—telesur, December 21, 2016

<http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/3000-US-Cities-Have-Lead-Poisoning-Rates-Higher-Than-Flints-20161221-0007.html>



REPORT: 20% OF U.S. WATER SYSTEMS CONTAIN LEAD

The Struggle Continues

From media cutoffs to lockdown, tracing the fallout from the U.S. prison action

By KAMALA KELKAR

Prisons in some states are withholding newspapers from inmates and attempting to shut down social media accounts operated for them by friends and relatives amid a action against prison conditions and billions of dollars worth of prison labor.

The passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865 formally abolished slavery, but with a stipulation that enabled plantation owners to use prisoners as a replacement for the lost labor. In recent decades, Victoria's Secret, Starbucks, Whole Foods, Revlon, AT&T, Target and many other major corporations have made use of prison labor that often pays pennies to the hour, a business plan enabled by the Amendment's exception. Prisoner duties can also include cleaning laundry, serving food and producing license plates, which reduce government costs.

A group called the Free Alabama Movement rallied for a September 9, 2016 labor action in spring. Prison authorities across the country began clamping down on news and information in ways that the American Civil Liberties Union says may be in violation of the First Amendment.

Amid action, prisons curtail media access

Texas and Pennsylvania have established statewide bans in their prisons of the *San Francisco Bay View National Black Newspaper*, a 40-year-old publication largely consisting of articles by inmates, saying that the content could be construed as provocation for disruption. The editor has also received letters from inmates in California, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana and other states that they say are also denying the

paper's delivery, sometimes without giving a reason at all.

Texas earlier this year also started asking *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and other social media platforms to shut down profiles that are maintained by friends and family in an inmate's name. Texas prisoners do not have access to the Internet.

"The Texas Department of Criminal Justice has been seeking to silence my voice," Keith "Malik" Washington wrote in a letter to the *PBS Newshour Weekend* in early December after being asked about the aftermath of the action. "[It] has been trying to find a way to punish me for exposing their misdeeds." He said he was in solitary confinement at Eastham Unit correctional facility in eastern Texas.

Washington wrote that a day before the beginning of what turned into the country's largest-ever prison action, including thousands of inmates across dozens of state prisons, two officers asked him to step out of his cell, handcuffed him and put him in solitary confinement. He had been vocal about his support for the action and is also a frequent contributor to the *Bay View* newspaper, which he said provides "much needed light on the midst of darkness."

When he found out Texas imposed a statewide prison block on the publication—because, as officials said, the paper contained information about the work stoppage—he pointed out that the *Wall Street Journal's* coverage of the action had been allowed to enter the prison.

Texas correctional facilities confirmed that the *Bay View* newspaper was withheld because it contained

information about the work stoppage, but did not respond to a request for comment about the discrepancy.

The paper's editor, Mary Ratcliff, has been publishing letters from prisoners for more than 20 years, choosing from about 1,000 submissions from across the country every month. She said that she thinks that correctional facilities are retaliating out of fear, calling it a "censorship epidemic."

"What they're ultimately afraid of is that the movement for abolition of prisons altogether will be much more successful than it's been, particularly with the importance of no free labor," she said. "They're terrified."

The director of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project, David Fathi, said two of the union's lawsuits reversed similar censoring in the past and charged that it infringed on the First Amendment rights of inmates and publishers. Inmates are allowed to read and write what they want, unless it threatens security, and people who are not in jail have the right to publish what they want and communicate with inmates, he said.

"It's important to recognize that when we're talking about speech between people on the inside and outside, it also burdens the rights of free people who have not been convicted of anything," he said.

In 2003, a federal judge banned a law in Arizona that had prohibited a coalition from posting online on behalf of inmates on death row, saying the law posed irreparable harm to the First Amendment.

"It was before the era of *Facebook*," Fathi said. "It was declared unconstitutional."

Then in 2012, the ACLU won a lawsuit on behalf of the law journal *Prison Legal News* that forced South Carolina to lift a ban on its publication at a detention center. Authorities had said the ban was “protecting health and safety.”

Decisions to censor, he said, don’t often serve the purpose the facilities say they do.

The growth of the prison labor force

The Free Alabama Movement has been working for several years to raise awareness about their premise—that prison labor is modern-day slavery. In 1865, the 13th Amendment, which is known as the formal abolition of slavery borne out of the Civil War, had one exception: it didn’t apply to people convicted of crimes.

At the time, former Confederate states feared the loss of their workforce and started passing laws that either targeted newly freed slaves or selectively enforced laws on them.

One racist law included that “All free negroes and mulattoes...found on the second Monday in January, 1866, or thereafter, with no lawful employment or business,” could be sent to jail.

Then prisons would rent convicts to plantation owners, who had to make less capital investment than slave owners, with even less incentive to treat workers well.

“And ever since that time, the criminal justice system has been a key mechanism for controlling the African-American population,” Fathi said last October during a presentation on mass incarceration at Central Washington University.

In recent decades, laws have continued to incriminate Black people while prisons and corporations make money off their labor. The War on Drugs led to sentencing laws that disproportionately affected Black people, including a mandatory five-year sentence for possessing five grams of crack cocaine. Meanwhile, someone carrying powder cocaine, which bears no major pharmaceutical

difference, needed to be carrying 500 grams for the same sentence.

By some estimates, 25 percent of crack users were Black, but they constituted 81 percent of those convicted on crack possession charges, while white people received lesser sentences for cocaine offenses.

Then, “three-actions” laws gave people automatic life sentences upon their third felony conviction in the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement bill, signed by former President Bill Clinton. The bill has been tied to the largest increase in prison population in U.S. history.

Today, the incarcerated population is 4.5 times larger than in 1980, with approximately 2.2 million people behind bars, according to the White House. And Black men continue to have the highest imprisonment rate in every age group—at the end of 2014 they were up to 10.5 times more likely to be behind bars than white men.

“Don’t come. They’re locking us down”

Any convicted prisoners can be required to work. By some estimates, prisoners’ industrial output generates billions in profits a year for private companies. In Michigan, inmates at the Kinross Correctional Facility work for the prison and make \$1 or \$2 a day for serving hot meals, sweeping floors, raising dogs and other jobs that keep operations running.

A spokesman for the state’s facilities said that the daily rate that Michigan pays its inmates is on the higher end, and that inmates do not need a lot of money because they do not have to pay for accommodations or healthcare.

But hundreds of the 1,300 inmates there participated in the action, the spokesman said, using the national movement as a flash point while making other demands.

In an interview with *Newshour Weekend* Evelyn Williams said she could hear sirens

when her *fiancé*, an inmate at the Kinross Correctional Facility who delivers laundry, called her on September 10, 2016 as she was getting ready to make the five-hour drive from Farmington Hills, Michigan, to visit.

“He was like, ‘Don’t come. They’re locking us down,’” Williams said. “I could hear the panic in his voice.”

Williams said she started hearing reports of pepper spray, tear gas, zip-ties, fires being set, broken appliances and assault. In the following days, more than 100 people were transferred. Williams says she waited for a week to hear from her *fiancé*—he was not hurt.

“They just did a peaceful demonstration,” she said. “It’s difficult for me to watch.”

The facility spokesman said that inmates had bullied others into participating in the action, and that the act of demonstrating is against the state’s policy because it is dangerous. The facility’s reaction, he said, was for the safety and benefit of everyone involved.

Williams saw it as a successful attempt to further suppress them.

“A lot of the people I talked to, they were saying they regret they had anything to do with it because of the consequences,” she said.

While state facilities maintain their actions are for the safety of inmates, spokesman Pastor Kenneth Glasgow for the Free Alabama Movement said prisoners expected push-back, no matter the justification. Glasgow said they are planning the next phases of their efforts, including protests against some of the companies benefiting from prison labor.

“You can’t sit up here and say slavery should be abolished and then have an exception,” Glasgow said. “Either you have slavery or you don’t. There should be no exceptions.”

—PBS *Newshour*, December 18, 2016

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/prison-action-lockdown-fallout/>

Chicano Moratorium Today

By JOSE H. VILLARREAL

The most profound act of internationalism that could be expressed today within U.S. borders is hands down the support of those pushing the Chicano Moratorium. Just as in yesteryear U.S. imperialism cannot continue to exploit those around the world without the use of the Chicano masses filling its military ranks. Just as in yesteryear we are left to decide how best to assist the Third World, and just as before, we continue to see that the Chicano Moratorium is the key to delivering the people from global oppression at the hands of the U.S.

The moratorium of the past

The war that Amerikkka took to the people of Vietnam was met by much resistance by the many sectors of the left in U.S. borderlands. The antiwar movement helped to pressure the imperialists and to send the message that the Third World had allies here in the imperialist center. But there were contradictions within the left of yesteryear, as contradictions remain today. These manifested in many different ways, especially how the internal semi-colonies expressed their own reaction to the U.S. war on Vietnam. For the Chicano nation, the reaction resulted in the Chicano Moratorium on August 29th 1970. This was perhaps the largest event that the Chicano nation expressed against U.S. imperialism, even to this day. Thousands came out and protested, but it was a protest that was meant to mobilize Aztlan, not just against the war, but against our colonial relationship to Amerikkka as well. All sectors of the nation were there, from Chicano revolutionaries to small children. It took place in East L.A. where the largest concentration of Chicanos continues to exist. And regardless of how you slice it, this was a revolutionary nationalist action.

What brought out the need for the Chicano Moratorium was the lopsided

death rates of Chicano soldiers who were in the U.S. military. Chicanos were dying at larger rates, and to top all that off, when they came back they were still oppressed in U.S. borders, deported, murdered by police, terrorized in the barrios, and forced to exist in a state that was not theirs and never would be.

...nothing is more vital to keep them in business than to keep the flow of Chicano bodies filling its ranks. To disrupt this flow is to deliver a grave blow to U.S. imperialism

As can be imagined, the oppressor nation reacted with violence to this revolutionary event. They reacted with gunshots that left death to our people. Among the dead were Ruben Salazar,¹ an award-winning journalist, news director of the local Spanish television station, and columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*. He began to be conscious of his place within the Chicano nation and realized that Chicanos never would be allowed to assimilate even if they wanted to. Salazar was shot when Deputy Thomas Wilson of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department fired a tear gas canister into the Silver Dollar Café at the conclusion of the August 29 rally, killing Salazar. For the oppressor, the thought of Aztlan rising up to demand self-determination was just too much. The thought of the Chicano nation educating Raza to boycott the U.S. military was not going to happen and the result was lethal violence aimed at Chicanos.

To the oppressor, death would ensure the slaves remain on the plantation. They were wrong.

Moratorium of today

The methods employed in years passed have now been updated by the oppressor, but their aims are still the same. Today undocumented Raza are lured into joining the U.S. military by the possibility to become U.S. citizens after serving. Today our youth are lured into the military through massive propaganda campaigns where there are military offices on school campuses; where the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) embed themselves into high schools and offer our youth a supposed way out of their oppression. It's the old carrot-and-stick approach where the military seems to be a way to relieve some of the national oppression that engulfs their lives. Video games are used to entice youth into an adventurous and exciting life. Militarism infects all aspects of our lives and complements the larger militarized culture that exists in the U.S. today.

Today Chicanos are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. military. What this means in political terms is that to U.S. imperialism nothing is more vital to keep them in business than to keep the flow of Chicano bodies filling its ranks. To disrupt this flow is to deliver a grave blow to U.S. imperialism. The Chicano Moratorium is a disruptor to the oppressor and being a disruptor is a good thing.

The numbers from the last U.S. census reveal that the only population within U.S. borders today that is increasing largely is the Raza population. This effects all aspects of U.S. society, including the military. This means that as Chicanos we are crucial to the future of the social relations within U.S. borders as well as what

occurs internationally. Our largest and most significant contribution to the movement outside of liberating our nation is in stopping the flow of Brown bodies into the U.S. military, and the Chicano Moratorium does this. The U.S. left should also find ways to support the Chicano Moratorium of today because this is what anti-imperialism looks like. The Chicano/a struggle of today is led by anti-imperialism. This is our compass.

All freedom loving people have a stake in the Chicano Moratorium of today, but for Chicanos it is our duty to build on the Chicano Moratorium and take it to the next level. We need to educate our children on the ills of the oppressor's military. We need to reach our communities and barrios. Chicano prisoners need to teach our fellow prisoners about this. Writers need to write about what the U.S. military has done to the oppressed nations around the globe.

How can defending the slave master ever be justified by the slave? How do we fight in a military that stole our land from mother Mexico? These are some of the questions that we need to ask each other while we re-build the Chicano Moratorium and forge ahead in our struggle for complete self-determination. Yes we want power, but Chicanos want power that comes without the oppression of other people. We want power that is not fueled by capitalism. Our power will only come when Aztlan is liberated. But the U.S. military is opposed to the liberation of Aztlan. This is why our youth and our children's children need to be taught not to serve the U.S. military, and instead serve Aztlan!

—Written at Pelican Bay State Prison

1 The Chicano Moratorium, August 29, 1970
“...more than 150 arrested and four were killed, including Gustav Montag, Lyn Ward, José Diaz, and Rubén Salazar.... As the Chicano poet Alurista put it: “The police called it a people's riot; the people called it a police riot”

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

Born In The USA

By KEVIN COOPER

Being born in America for a certain group of people, isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Especially when one can end up in jail, or prison, or the graveyard, simply for being who you are, as you were born.

Just sitting in your car reading a book and minding your own business while being Black can get you dead. Or walking down the street while being Black can get you detained, arrested or murdered, just because you are Black.

Defending your constitutional rights against the racist police and classist power system can get you killed if you do so while being Black.

Even if you walk away from the police with your hands raised high in the air while Black, you can still get killed. Or if you lay down on the street with your hands held high in the air while Black, you can still get shot by the police.

Listening to loud music while Black; knocking on the wrong person's front door for help while Black; fitting the description of a crime suspect who has a wide nose while Black, and especially playing with a toy gun while Black—even if you're a child—can get you six feet under here in America.

All of these things, and more can be stated over and over and over again because they are the truths that Black people have to live with, and have died

because of, in this country.

Most citizens in America take their everyday lives, and events that take place within their lives, for granted. But, for Black people in America, we cannot afford to take anything we do or say for granted, because if we do, it may be the very last thing that we ever do or say in America.

To me—a Black man living the American nightmare in America—these things are a Goddamn shame.

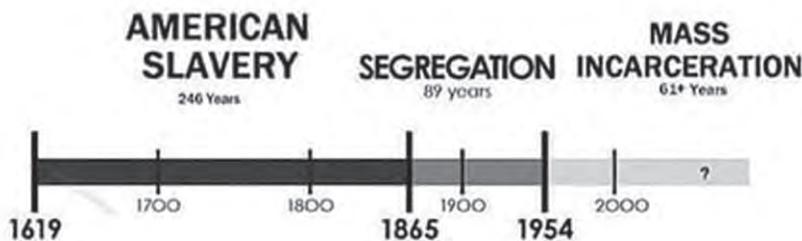
Whether we are executed by the hands of the police on the street, or executed by the hands of these volunteer executioners behind prison walls; or gunned down by the George Zimmermans of this country, we Black people have been marked for death just by being born in the USA, and that's a Goddamn crime against our humanity!

While many people are, and rightly so, living and enjoying the American dream, others—many others—are, in fact, experiencing the American nightmare, just because of the color of their skin.

Kevin Cooper is an innocent man on San Quentin's Death Row in California. He continues to struggle for exoneration and to abolish the death penalty in the whole U.S.

Write to Kevin Cooper at:
Kevin Cooper C-65304, 4 EB 82
San Quentin State Prison
San Quentin, CA 94974
www.freekevincooper.org

WHEN WAS AMERICA EVER GREAT?



Who Really Killed Him? An ode to Terrence Crutcher by Christopher Dye

You say she killed him.
Not because he'd put his hands up or because he'd turned and walked away or because his car broke down. She killed him after we'd trained her in lethal violence after we'd given her a gun and a badge

both loaded with expectation after we'd trained her to see him not as a stranded motorist but as a black man AKA a threat. After we'd trained her she gave him a bullet. And his family a funeral.

We gave each other tired stereotypes and empty rhetoric. While we kept skeptical eyes on each other. When will we talk honestly as one humanity about who really killed him? It's time for that dialog now.

Write to:
Christopher Dye, 805217
59 Darrington Road
Rosharon, TX 77583-5057

Halt the Execution of Kevin Cooper

The U.S. must immediately halt execution of Kevin Cooper—UN rights experts urge

GENEVA (November 14, 2016)—A group of United Nations human rights experts¹ today urged Jerry Brown, Governor of the State of California United States, to halt the execution of Kevin Cooper, who was convicted for murder following judicial proceedings that reportedly did not meet international standards of fair trial and due process.

Mr. Cooper is expected to be among the first inmates to be executed when lethal injections resume in California. On November 8, 2016, a bid to abolish the death penalty in California (Proposition 62) has been defeated, while Proposition 66, which speeds up the appeals process and quickens the pace of executions, was approved.²

In July 1983, Mr. Cooper, a 25 year old African American was arrested for the murders of a couple and their young children in Chino Hills, outside of Los Angeles. Despite testimonies and evidence suggesting that the crimes had been committed by several men, white or Latinos, the police is said to have carried out limited investigations solely directed at demonstrating Cooper's culpability.

It is also alleged that his trial was marred with procedural irregularities including false evidence at trial on several occasions, the presentation of manipulated testimony and alteration of the results of blood sample.

“There are strong indications that the death penalty may be carried out against Mr. Cooper following judicial procedures that do not fulfill the most stringent guarantees of fair trial and due process, including access to adequate legal assistance and conviction upon clear and convincing evidence,” the experts noted.

“If it were to proceed, his execution will most likely constitute a grave violation of applicable international human rights standards,” they stressed.

The experts recalled the 2009 warning by five federal appellate judges, which said that the State of California could “be about to execute an innocent man.” Six additional federal appellate judges joined dissents finding that Mr. Cooper never had a fair hearing to prove his innocence.

The eleven Ninth Circuit Judges' dissent determined that evidence against Mr. Cooper was likely planted or manipulated by authorities and that exculpatory evidence was destroyed or withheld from the defense. It also stressed that the state would not have been able to obtain a conviction against Mr. Cooper without the planted evidence and had the exculpatory evidence been disclosed.

“To proceed with Mr. Cooper's execution without proper investigation into the allegation of grave irregularities during his trial would be utterly unacceptable and in flagrant contravention of the United States' national and international obligations,” the UN experts warned.

“International law, accepted as binding by the U.S., provides that capital punishment may only be imposed following trials that comply with the most stringent requirements of fair trial and due process, or could otherwise be considered an arbitrary execution,” they stressed.

The UN independent experts also stressed that the UN Human Rights Committee and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have urged the U.S. Federal Government to consider establishing a federal moratorium on the death penalty.

The Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.³

For more information and media requests please contact Mr. Johel Dominique (+41 22 928 93 98 / jdominique@ohchr.org) or write to eje@ohchr.org.

For media inquiries related to other UN independent experts:

Xabier Celaya, UN Human Rights—Media Unit (+ 41 22 917 9383 / xcelaya@ohchr.org)

For your news websites and social media: Multimedia content and key messages relating to our news releases are available on UN Human Rights social media channels, listed below. Please tag us using the proper handles:

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Instagram: [unitednationshumanrights](https://www.instagram.com/unitednationshumanrights)

Google+: [unitednationshumanrights](https://plus.google.com/+unitednationshumanrights)

Youtube: [unohchr](https://www.youtube.com/unohchr)

1 The experts: Ms. Agnes Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mr. Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and Mr. Ricardo Sunga, current chairperson of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.

2 Now on hold because of a lawsuit challenging Proposition 66's constitutionality.

3 Learn more, log on to:

Obama's Pardons

Obama's pardons distract from the horror of mass Black incarceration

BY GLEN FORD

President Obama, a master of public relations, now has bragging rights for having granted clemency to a record number of federal prisoners—1,176 of them, at last count, more than those set free by the past 11 presidents, combined. Looking at the number from a different angle, Obama released only one out of every two thousand of the nation's 2.3 million prison inmates, the largest incarcerated population in the world, both in raw numbers and in the proportion of U.S. society living behind bars. In other words, Obama's clemencies, like all other presidents', are statistically meaningless and morally and politically distractive. But, of course, that's what Obama's good at—distracting people.

The incompetent, lazy and white-supremacist corporate media forget, or never reported, that for several years the Obama administration delayed the release from prison of five times as many inmates as he pardoned: about 6,000 federal prisoners convicted under the old crack cocaine laws. A federal appeals court wanted to let them out, ruling that they were covered by a prison reform bill, but President Obama successfully argued to keep these men and women in prison. Several years later, Obama staged a huge public relations extravaganza, releasing many of these same inmates, supposedly out of the goodness of his heart. It was two years too late. Some never got out.

The Brennan Center for Justice released a study last month that concluded the U.S. could set free 39 percent of its prison population with no threat to public safety. The Brennan researchers argue that you can't make a dent in the mass incarceration system unless whole categories of prisoners are made eligible for immediate release.

They say 25 percent of the prison population should, instead, have been sentenced to drug treatment, community service, probation or a fine. Another 14 percent of inmates have already served enough time in prison, and are no longer a risk. Together, that comes to almost 40 percent of the prison population—one and a half million people, about half of them Black.

“Not even a half-way measure”

Prison reformers seem to think the system can be made more rational and fair. They don't seem to understand that the system is deliberately racist, brutal, arbitrary and malevolent—it is not meant to be fair, and it cannot be reformed. Former Black Panther Sundiata Acoli turns 80 this month. He has been in a New Jersey prison since 1973 and first became eligible for parole in 1992, but was turned down by the parole board, which set his next parole hearing for 15 years from now, when Sundiata Acoli will be 95-years-old.

This system is pure meanness and race-hate. The Brennan Center's proposal to release almost 40 percent of prison inmates is, itself, not even a halfway measure. As the Black Is Back Coalition for Social Justice, Peace and Reparations points out in number five of its 19 point platform on Black self-determination, the United States would have to release 80 percent of its prison population—four out of every five inmates—just to bring the incarceration rate down to 1973 levels. And, remember: the U.S. was already the worst mass incarceration state in the world back in 1973. Even the release of four out every five inmates does not change the essential nature of American mass Black incarceration. There can be no compromise with such an evil.

—*Black Agenda Report*, January 3, 2017

Former FBI Agent Calls for Clemency for Leonard Peltier

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

In a letter sent to President Obama, a former FBI Special Agent called for the president to grant clemency to Native American activist and federal prisoner Leonard Peltier, who has served over 40 years in prison after being convicted in a flawed trial for the deaths of two FBI agents.

Former Agent John C. “Jack” Ryan wrote in the letter “In my opinion...the circumstances surrounding the case in combination with the passage of four decades of time served to support his request to live his final years at home.”

Peltier was convicted in 1975, and has remained behind bars despite concerns about political bias and injustice that have clouded his case. Now the 72-year-

old’s health is failing, he has exhausted all appeals, and he is not up for parole until 2024. More than 100,000 people have signed an *Amnesty International* petition calling for him to be freed.

Ryan was a charter member of the FBI Agents Association and was with the Bureau from 1966 to his removal in 1987, when he refused to investigate activists protesting U.S. involvement in Nicaragua because he believed that they had done nothing wrong. As an agent, he wrote in his letter, “we were taught to follow orders and we acted on good faith on the directions given, believing we were doing the right thing.” Of the events that led to the end of his FBI career, he said “I was faced

with a moral dilemma and did what I thought was right.”

“The FBI’s perpetual demonization of Leonard Peltier is an effort to poison public opinion and avoid self-reflection,” said Cynthia K. Dunne, a former federal prosecutor and co-counsel for Peltier. “Mr. Peltier’s clemency petition is not a referendum on federal law enforcement. It presents a moral imperative which President Obama has the opportunity to address. By reckoning with the past and moving forward in the best interests of justice, reconciliation and compassion, we can become a stronger nation. It is time to free Leonard Peltier.”

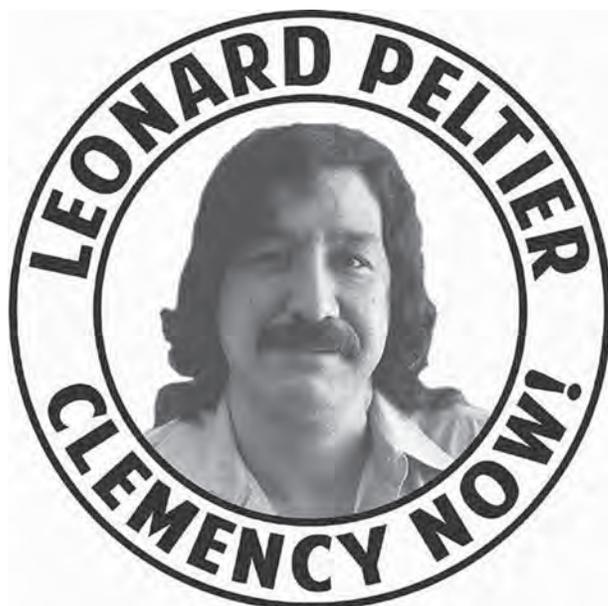
“Leonard Peltier may die in prison unless the president acts before his term is up,” said Zeke Johnson of Amnesty International USA. “President Obama should seize the opportunity to grant clemency to Leonard Peltier as a humanitarian gesture that President-elect Trump cannot reverse.”

Last week, the former head of the prosecution team that convicted Peltier also wrote to President Obama calling for clemency. Former U.S. Attorney James H. Reynolds wrote that clemency for Peltier would be “in the best interest of Justice.”

Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, Dave Archambault II also sent a letter to President Obama about the case. Over 50 Members of Congress and others—including federal appellate Judge Gerald Heaney, who sat as a member of the court in two of Peltier’s appeals—have all called for his immediate release.

—*Amnesty International*, January 9, 2017

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/news/press-releases/former-fbi-agent-calls-for-clemency-for-leonard-peltier>



**40 YEARS
ENOUGH!**
WHOISLEONARDPELTIER.INFO

Top Prosecutor Urges Clemency for Leonard Peltier

By SAM LEVIN

A senior U.S. attorney who was involved in the prosecution of Native American activist Leonard Peltier has requested that Barack Obama grant clemency, with a rare plea that has energized the campaign to free the high-profile indigenous prisoner.

James Reynolds, who supervised a key part of the case against Peltier, who claims he was wrongfully convicted of the 1975 murders of two FBI agents, wrote to the president that clemency for the 72-year-old would be “in the best interest of justice in considering the totality of all matters involved.”

“There seems to be no point in taxpayers paying his room and board,” Reynolds, 77, said by phone on Wednesday, January 4, 2017. “It’s time to call it quits.”

The letter is an extraordinary development for the Native American activist who has been incarcerated for more than 40 years. Civil rights activists and indigenous leaders have long argued that he faced a deeply flawed and unfair trial.

The clemency push from a former U.S. prosecutor, which is highly unusual, comes as Obama has continued to pardon or commute the sentences of hundreds of prisoners in his final weeks in office, raising hopes that he will also release political activists jailed for decades.

Peltier’s conviction stems from the American Indian Movement’s siege of the site of the Wounded Knee massacre where the U.S. army slaughtered hundreds of Lakota people in 1890. The actions at the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, which began in 1973 and protested broken treaties, prompted an aggressive response from the FBI.

Peltier, who is serving two life sentences, arrived in June of 1975, and soon after two FBI agents entered private property and sparked a shootout. The special agents, Jack Coler and

Ronald Williams, were killed during the confrontation, along with Joseph Stuntz, a Native American.

According to Peltier’s attorneys, who filed a clemency request last year, federal agents made false statements and affidavits, coerced witness statements and deliberately withheld crucial ballistics reports. A prosecutor eventually admitted in court that the U.S. attorney’s office “can’t prove who shot [the agents]” and claimed that Peltier was guilty of “aiding and abetting” in the shooting.

Reynolds was appointed U.S. attorney in 1976 and oversaw the case’s appeal when much of the evidence that raised serious doubts about the government’s case were revealed.

The former prosecutor’s letter to Obama does not address the underlying conviction, and in an interview, he declined to say whether he believed Peltier is innocent.

But Reynolds said it was wrong for Peltier to remain behind bars after 40 years, particularly considering that prosecutors ultimately considered him an accomplice in the crime. “You’re not really participating in the crime yourself. Just because you’re there, you’re going to get nailed.”

Citing Peltier’s motives, Reynolds added, “...he didn’t go out there with the intention to kill anybody. He was trying to protect his people.”

Cynthia K Dunne, a former assistant U.S. attorney who is representing Peltier, said she has never heard of a case of a federal prosecutor requesting clemency.

“It’s really incredibly extraordinary to have the lead prosecutor on the case stand up,” she said, noting that the FBI has continued to oppose Peltier’s release. “It takes a lot of strength to take on the institution.”

Dunne, who communicates regularly with Peltier, said he was pleased to learn of Reynolds’ letter, but didn’t want to get his hopes up given past disappointments: “It’s just a horrible time to be waiting and not knowing.”

The renewed fight for clemency comes at a time when the Standing Rock tribe’s fight against an oil pipeline in North Dakota has become an international flashpoint for indigenous rights. Local law enforcement’s harsh tactics and aggressive prosecutions have drawn parallels to the government’s treatment of Peltier.

The Obama administration’s recent decision to deny a key permit for the Dakota Access pipeline has further sparked hope that he may seek to release Peltier and cement his legacy on indigenous rights.

Time is running out before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, who is not expected to continue Obama’s records of clemency grants and pardons.

Peltier’s request for clemency is not a pardon appeal, but simply asks that Obama reduce the sentence. “If he doesn’t take action before 19 January,” Dunne added, “Mr. Peltier will die in jail. He’s too frail and too sick to make it much longer in the prison system.”

—*The Guardian*, January 4, 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/04/free-leonard-peltier-obama-open-letter-james-reynolds>



Bound and Gassed

My reward for exposing abuses and killings of Texas prisoners

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

December 21, 2016—Today I was set up for both assault and to have almost all of my personal property taken upon threats to do so by several staff at this Clements Unit. I was assaulted while handcuffed inside my cell from behind.

The facts of the incident follow:

At around 11:00 A.M. I was confronted by Captain Patricia Flowers and Lieutenant Crystal Turner and told to allow myself to be handcuffed in order to be removed from the cell. Several weeks prior to this I had a run-in with Flowers when she was making rounds in the pod with others, including Major Leroy Cano. Another prisoner asked me if she was the new segregation captain, I told him yes and she was taking the place of the previous captain, D. Dean, who was apparently under investigation for an incident involving another officer. I told him her full name. At the time she was standing talking to a prisoner in the cell across from me named Allen Knight.

When I said this she turned to me and said, "You need to shut the fuck up!" I replied that her "potty mouth isn't professional." She replied, "You're the one who likes to put your mouth in things you have no business in. You call it 'exposing' us huh. Well keep running your mouth in here or anywhere else and I'll take all your shit." I asked, for what reason she would take all my property. She answered, "I don't have to have a reason." I addressed Cano about her threat as he walked by and he only smiled at me and kept going.

When I was confronted, I was taken to a holding cell. While I was in the cell, at separate times, Flowers and Turner came past me and I asked what was going on. Both stated they were taking all my property because I don't know

how to "mind [my] business." I asked how they were going to justify this when most of my property is legal. Flowers said it was "improperly stored," and called back to Turner on her radio (Turner was in my cell,) and told her to leave whatever legal property had not thus far been packed up.

I told her and Leonard (who also came by) that my property was separated on my bunk under instructions of law library staff who were supposed to come and perform an inventory and measurement on all my legal and other property under what's called a "subsequent legal storage" review. This is done every six months for prisoners with pending court cases, where he must separate all of his property so they can determine what specific materials relate to what pending cases, measure the property that applies to each case and make a record of it, and measure all other property to ensure that what's kept in the cell that's not legal is no more than a one-foot-by-one-foot cube. Also according to the prisoner orientation manual, the only time that property must be stored away is when the prisoner voluntarily leaves his living area, otherwise he is free to have it out of the stored area to use while inside the cell. So the entire claim that my property was "improperly stored" was bogus and a pretext to falsely justify its taking. Flowers and a Sergeant Arleen Waak, and Turner also threatened me with physical assault while I was in the holding cell.

I was then later taken back to the cell by Leonard and upon entering the cell observed my property was largely missing and what was left were only loose papers that were thrown around the cell. I told Leonard I needed to see Turner and/or Flowers because I needed my property which, was most of my

legal materials (including all my books and stationery) and other materials. Leonard called Waak to the cell and both refused to summon Turner or Flowers whom Waak said, to tell me they didn't care about my issues. Waak also called me "nigger" and threatened me with assault by staff. She had a guard, Jennifer Young, bring a portable audio-video camera to my cell and record me, at which point, I stated my issues and that I needed my property to meet court deadlines. Instead of addressing my issues, Waak ordered Leonard to spray me with gas as I stood in the cell still fully restrained from behind in handcuffs. I was never threatening nor did I refuse any orders. I only tried to get them to have the ranking staff who had my property taken address the situation.

I was then left in the gas-contaminated cell with gas-covered linen, bedding and clothes. I asked on camera to be decontaminated, and was refused. The same was the response to my request to have the cell decontaminated. Everything is still gas-contaminated as I write this, near midnight on December 11, 2016.

A nurse came to my cell after I was gassed and I asked for fresh air, to have my eyes flushed, and to have the cell decontaminated. She ignored me. The nurse was Tammy Williams, a defendant in several lawsuits (that she knows I was involved in) brought against her for her role in killing several prisoners, including Joseph Arcade Comeaux.

At 1:08 P.M. I also asked nurse Delores Carrizalas, as she made pill rounds in my pod, for my medical needs. She refused me any aid although as she walked past my cell the gas coming from my cell was so strong she was coughing and gagging.

Waak allowed a substantial amount of my personal property to be thrown away as trash including drinking cups, pens, and other items.

Another officer Rodolfo Trevino filled out a confiscation form for some of my taken property and admitted to me that a lot of documents were taken, and that he didn't know what was legal and what wasn't. He said Turner told him and several other rookie officers to just take everything because I "have too much shit," but later told him to just take what wasn't legal that hadn't already been bagged (a lot of the legal property had already been bagged up at that point.) She told him to just say it was all "improperly stored."

Later that evening I spoke with Lieutenant Stephen Thomas about the incident with another officer present named Britta Townsend, and Thomas admitted that my property should not

have been taken as improperly stored unless I had voluntarily left the cell such as for recreation and at that time had not put it into its storage space. He also agreed that based on the awaited legal property review it still shouldn't have been taken. Britta signed a statement confirming that I was left and remained in a gas-contaminated cell with contaminated bedding, and that Thomas made these admissions to me in her presence.

I also found that my typewriter had been broken. Pieces of the frame are broken off so that it may be confiscated at a later time as altered or damaged.

Numerous other prisoners witnessed all of the foregoing. Several asked for witness statements on the use of force and Turner and other guards refused to provide them with any.

And while I need all possible support, aid and exposure in response to

these abuses against me, I am not and won't be deterred in continuing to shine a much-needed light into these dark and corrupt institutions.

Kevin Rashid Johnson's writings and artwork have been widely circulated. He is the author of a new book, Panther Vision: Essential Part Writings and Art of Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, Minister of Defense, New Afrikan Black Panther Party, (Kersplebedeb, 2010).

Write or email:

Kevin Johnson, TDCI # 01859887
Clements Unit 9601 Spur 591
Amarillo, TX 79107
krj.nabpppc@gmail.com

Protest to:

Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Ombudsman
P.O. Box 99
Huntsville, TX 77342-0099
Phone: (936) 437-4927
Fax: (936) 437-4930
ombudsman@tdcj.texas.gov

Another Texas Prisoner Dead

Prison officials killed Alton Rodgers

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

Note: We printed only part of this article in the September/October issue of Socialist Viewpoint, Vol. 16, No. 5. We print the entire piece now because the author is being retaliated against for this and other articles exposing the killing of prisoners by Texas prison guards. —The Editors

Thirty-one-year-old Alton Rodgers, a Black man imprisoned at the Clements Unit in Amarillo, Texas, died on January 19, 2016, at the Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo. He was found unconscious in his cell the day before by guards.

According to the autopsy reports, the official cause of death was bleeding of the brain and skull fracture caused by blunt-force trauma. He was also covered in bedsores and in a state of acute starvation and dehydrated.

According to officials, Rodgers and his cellmate were involved in a fight during which they claim Rodgers suffered his head injury. With this narrative set, officials have focused on investigating and treating Rodgers' death as a homicide committed by his cellmate. But as the media has pointed out, the head trauma could have happened before the altercation.

This and other facts, such as Rodgers' physical condition are complicating the story officials want to maintain. Particularly the fact that the bedsores showed that he'd been lying unattended for weeks, during which time he'd slowly wasted away. Which meant prison officials were at least in part responsible for his death, and therefore as liable as they were trying to make his cellmate, if not more so. And

the liability could extend as far up as the Director's office of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) [sic!].



So, a mild in-house “investigation” of staff was staged. Not a criminal investigation, mind you, but one obviously addressed to “fixing” those inconvenient details, giving an impression of administrative discipline of those found responsible (but not of Rodgers’ death of course), and minimizing and tightening the circle of officials found responsible and liable. In short, it was an exercise in damage control.

Since I’ve been imprisoned at Clements Unit as this entire situation unfolded, I’ve borne witness to much of it.

The staff involvement

At the time of Rodgers’ death TDCJ director Brad Livingston and various guards and medical staff at Clements Unit had just been sued by the families of two prisoners who’d died at the Unit as a result of neglect by medical staff and guards. In fact I contributed to and wrote articles about those killings¹, and brought those incidents and material evidence and witnesses to the attention of the attorney who brought those lawsuits.

This is likely why Livingston’s office tried to distance itself from responsibility in yet another prisoner death at the same Unit, and making itself appear to have pinpointed those who were liable and punished them. He also changed the administration of the Unit which those lawsuits showed to be notorious for violent abuses of its prisoners.

So in the wake of Rodgers’ death and an investigation bearing down on them, Clements Unit staff became suddenly over-zealous about conducting required cell checks in solitary confinement (long-term segregation), where Rodgers and I were confined, every 30 minutes. Also, in performing required identification checks twice daily of all prisoners which involved making certain that each is alive and active, and doing routine cell inspections and searches during which each cell’s occupants are handcuffed and brought out of their cells. If any of these things had been conducted properly before,

Rodgers would have been discovered in his unresponsive state long before he’d deteriorated to the point of death.

As a result of the limited staff investigation 18 officials at the unit were “disciplined”, which included suspensions, and the warden and assistant warden conveniently retired and resigned. The entire staff were walking on eggshells while the investigation was ongoing, and the prisoners were made to suffer for it. We were, and continue to be awakened at all hours of the day and night by guards kicking and banging on our cell doors, and cursing us, to conduct cell checks, inspections and searches.² Ranking officials (captains, lieutenants, and sergeants) began making rounds in the cellblocks during each shift, something one never saw before. Cell searches and inspections were conducted routinely, whereas previously, months would pass without any such activities.

What wasn’t investigated

Many of the staff feared losing their jobs and what the investigation might reveal, and were vocal about it. But the investigation obviously didn’t dig too deeply, because much of what the staff did (and didn’t do) that actually facilitated Rodgers’ death wasn’t acted on. A large part of that was extensive falsification of prison records by many of them, that made it appear as though Rodgers was up and about up to the very time he was discovered in a vegetative condition in his cell.

The records falsifications were extreme and spanned the staff body. Rodgers was prescribed daily medications according to witnesses. But while he was clearly bedridden, medical staff were delivering his medications to his cell and documenting falsely that he was the one receiving and taking them; also that he never voiced any medical concerns, as if they were also inquiring after his well-being. Guards working his pod were documenting his receipt of his three daily meals, when he obvi-

ously wasn’t. A \$39.98 commissary purchase of food items and snacks was made in his name shortly before he’d died. Clearly these records were falsified. Commissary purchases in segregation and “close custody” are filled by the prisoner turning in a list of ordered items along with his identification card to staff, the order is then brought to the prisoner’s cell by commissary staff the same day. He is then required to come to his cell door where his face is compared by staff to his I.D. picture, and he’s required to give his prison number. He then signs and places his thumbprint in black ink on the sales receipt which officials keep for records. The staff person who processes and delivers the order is indicated by her/his initials on the receipt. The prisoner is then delivered the commissary order.

Obviously, a bedridden Rodgers was not the one who received those orders made in his name. It should be noted that right after Rodgers died, the commissary staffer who was responsible for those deliveries in the Unit, Jessica Roach, suddenly didn’t work at Clements Unit anymore. Rumor had it, she abruptly quit. Of further note is on December 11, 2015, she delivered a commissary order made for one Glen Whitmire, #1959401 (purchased for him by one Angela Whitmire, via an internet-based ordering system that the TDCJ has for its prisoners, called E-Comm), to another prisoner Jason Renard Walker, #1532092. When this occurred, Walker, who is assigned to the same pod as I am, sent me the receipt explaining to me what occurred. I critiqued him for accepting the order, but he assured me that the intended recipient would be notified by himself, and should then be reimbursed for the mix-up by the TDCJ. I was and remain unconvinced, yet it confirms that staffer’s inclination to deliver commissary orders to the wrong prisoners, even deliberately, because Walker informed me that he told her repeatedly that the order was not his, and he did not have

a matching I.D. card. He said Roach imposed on him to “just take it.”

Also, mental health staff were falsely documenting themselves as making weekly checks on Rodgers and finding him in good mental health.

If any of these contacts with Rodgers had actually been made at any time during the weeks leading up to his death, he would have been discovered long before he deteriorated to the point that his condition became critical. But all of these records were falsified. I and many other prisoners listened to the staff talking openly in our presence, but among themselves, (but often to us as well), admitting their wrongs and their consequent fear of the investigation’s outcome. When it was finally concluded, many of them were openly relieved. They’d gotten away scot-free; or with only a tap on the wrist. But Rodgers lost his life, and those of us who’ve been accused of taking human lives are vilified as monsters and resigned to the worst imaginable treatments and ostracism.

Quite a few guards also remarked that Rodgers’ cellmate was found to be over ten pounds heavier than previously recorded, on the day Rodgers was removed from the cell, implying that he’d been consuming more than his own share of food for awhile.

The cover up

On April 1, 2016, Aaron Davis, a reporter with the Amarillo-Globe News, wrote an article reporting on the findings of Rodgers’ final autopsy report. It indicated he was in an acute state of starvation and showed signs of pneumonia, but officials weren’t addressing any of this, and were instead focusing on the set narrative implicating his cellmate and absolving staff in his death. These were the concerns of Rodgers’s loved ones.

As noted, officials’ aims have been to keep attention and responsibility focused on a convenient scapegoat

(namely Rodgers’ cellmate), and off staff. Starvation and pneumonia meant Rodgers had been left neglected by staff while in obvious physical distress, and his bedsores showed that large numbers of records had been falsified leading to his death. Which meant legal liability went far beyond his cellie, and in fact might even absolve him and instead implicate staff up to the highest ranking levels of the TDCJ.

So the TDCJ responded quickly through its information officer Robert Hurst, who was cited in a follow-up article by Aaron Davis, dated April 5, which had this PR man denying that Rodgers was actually in a state of starvation stemming from neglect, but rather that he had been starving himself, since records showed that he’d made a commissary purchase and was receiving his meals. Remember, the records he’s citing are the ones Clements Unit staff were falsifying. Hurst went on to refer to prior complaints made by Rodgers that staff were tampering with his food, to imply that this was the reason he had not been eating, namely his paranoid fear that his food was tainted. Hurst made no attempt to explain Rodgers’ bedsores which proved he’d been bedridden for quite some time, or of the head injury that had left him comatose. This because the objective was to counter anything that tended to deviate from the TDCJ’s established narrative and chosen scapegoat’s responsibility. There wasn’t, and has never been, any interest in revealing the truth of what happened to Rodgers and who’s to blame. In fact the goal was the exact opposite; to conceal the facts and maintain a narrative that shifted liability away from TDCJ officials, especially those at the highest levels.

Conclusion

This is how the value system of U.S. officials works. They kill or contribute to the deaths of an imprisoned and powerless person, or otherwise a per-

son of color, then close ranks and go to the greatest lengths to cover up and lie about what they’ve done, all the while manufacturing a narrative and managing a damage control campaign through in-house investigations that they completely control to manipulate the outcomes. The end result is they create the official version of the story which becomes the only publicized version of the story.

What the common people get, however, is another unjustified death at the hands of a thoroughly unscrupulous and corrupt system that pretends to represent the interests of those it manipulates and rules over.

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

1 See, “Texas Prison Officials and Medical Staff Kill Prisoners and Move to Silence Witnesses.” <http://rashidmod.com/?p=966>. Also in Socialist Viewpoint, Vol. 14, No. 5, http://www.socialistviewpoint.org/sepoct_14/sepoct_14_28.html and “Asthmatic Prisoner Doused With Pepper Spray, Refused Medical Care, Dies; Just Another Day in the Texas Prison System.” <http://rashidmod.com/?p917>

2 Another prisoner at Clements Unit wrote about these harassments in an article that discussed the early aftermath of the Rodgers death. See, Jason Walker, “California Prison Sleep Deprivation Hits Texas: How the Mysterious Death of One Prisoner Results in a Cause of Action to Torture Others.” <http://rashidmod.com/?p=2076>



End Prison Retaliations

Texas prison officials retaliate against me for protesting prison slavery

By KEITH “MALIK” WASHINGTON

On October 5, 2016, I was transferred to the Telford Unit from the Coffield Unit. At Coffield, I had become the target of a coordinated effort by the State of Texas to retaliate against me for organizing a campaign that seeks to end prison slavery.

There are elements and individuals within the Texas Criminal Justice System that don't want to acknowledge the humanity of prisoners. The Slave Plantation mentality is deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Telford, where I am now housed, is the home of a horrible Solitary Confinement

control unit. I was sent to this control unit in order to be neutralized.

Prison officials are also using their new Social Media Ban to punish me when my friends or supporters post any kind of information about me. It is crucially important that you continue to share with the world what is happening to me and to so many other imprisoned Freedom Fighters who are trapped inside Amerikan prisons. This attempt to silence prisoner voices and the voices of our free-world supporters is a gross violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Journalist Raven Rakia, who resides in New York City, actually traveled to

Texas to interview me for an upcoming *exposé* she is working on. Texas prison officials denied her access to me. I just cannot describe to you how dangerous this situation is becoming.

I attempted to place Raven Rakia and other media correspondents and friends on my visiting list. Prison officials denied receiving any updated visitation forms from me.

Sisters and brothers, I cannot fight these people without your help. I am asking you to call the Telford Unit in New Boston, Texas—(903) 628-3171—and demand that I be granted visits from media correspondents, friends, and lawyers. I am requesting that media correspondents and lawyers attempt to visit me and make contact with me so that I can relay to the public how Texas has framed me and isolated me.

Our struggle begins with amending the 13th amendment: we must abolish Prison Slavery in Amerika!

Furthermore, we must confront and question law enforcement agencies who attempt to demonize and criminalize #Black Lives Matter! The murdering of Black people by the police must be addressed.

Prisoner Rights activist Laura Whitehorn said, “Rather than slaughtering Black people outright, the prison system carries out genocide through political repression.”

Sisters and brothers, I am taking a risk by communicating these words to you. I am asking you to do something to help me shed light on the nature of the Texas Criminal Justice System.

Dare to struggle, dare to win! All power to the people!

Write to:
Keith H. Washington #1487958
Telford Unit
3899 State Hwy 98
New Boston, TX 75570



Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

BY CAROLE SELIGMAN

This is a speech presented at the December 9, 2016 demonstration in Oakland, CA, in solidarity with an action in Philadelphia on the 35th anniversary of the arrest, attempted murder, and frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal. The speaker was representing the Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an innocent man. Like many others, he was shot by cops on the street. He was framed and sent to death row. Now he's on slow death row—serving a sentence of life without parole—a very American form of torture. He's there because he was targeted and framed by the FBI and racist Philadelphia City cops, prosecutors, and courts. Somehow, through 35 years of intense prison torture, he continues, as a journalist, to be an intellectual leader of resistance to the U.S. imperialist empire.

Young artists of Oakland have just been the victims of how this empire works at the level of the Oakland City government. A completely preventable disaster, the fire that killed 36 people is totally the product of greedy landlords and their acquisition of wealth-by-any-and-all means, AND the protection of this system of profiteering-from-housing by city government.

The same kinds of City and State and federal governmental institutions, whether they are run by conservative Republicans or so-called progressive Democrats, from Fire Department inspectors, to housing inspectors, to prison administrators, to parole boards, administer a system—capitalism—for the profits of the less-than-one-percent. And, that profiteering system of oppression and inequality that rules this society means that working class people do not have the right to freedom from torture and prison, do not have the right to safe housing, do not have the right to clean water, do not have the right to be free of a toxic environment of lead-filled water, par-

ticulate filled air, pesticide laden soil, nuclear waste, and war. And prisoners do not have the right to treatment of curable diseases although a Pennsylvania judge has ruled that such denial of healthcare constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. Despite this ruling, Pennsylvania still does not provide proven effective treatment for Hepatitis C, a disease that nearly killed Mumia last year and which he and thousands of Pennsylvania prisoners suffer from. Because older people are now being urged through TV ads by pharmaceutical companies to get tested for Hep C, and there is available medicine to cure it, you would think that logically such treatment would be automatically provided to prisoners whose healthcare is in the control of the state. No. Logic has nothing to do with such conditions. It had nothing to do with the preventable fire deaths in Oakland—unless you consider capitalist oppression—a system based on profiteering—to be logical.

In other words, the struggle for a safe, healthy, peaceful, and free human existence are all related because the enemy of all these conditions is the capitalist system.

The Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal has worked to organize working people to join the struggle to free our innocent brother from prison. Mumia is innocent of the crime he was convicted of by a racist judge and a jury that purposely excluded Black people.

At every level of his case, a corrupt and racist system prevailed, so that the evidence of his incontrovertible innocence, including a confession by another man, and testimony by eye-witnesses to the murder of Police Officer Faulkner, have been excluded from any hearing, trial or appeals proceedings.

There was one important victory in this 35-year-old case. Mumia was

spared execution and his sentence changed from execution to slow death row—life without parole. The reason this happened was because a mass movement with big mass actions, demonstrations, even the one-day shut down of the Ports of Oakland and the whole West Coast in 1999, and a teach-in on the death penalty and Mumia's case throughout the Oakland city schools, demanded Mumia's freedom. It was a mass movement that could not be ignored.

Now, a new Supreme Court decision provides a very important legal opening for Mumia to walk out of prison. The decision, *Williams vs. Pennsylvania*, ruled that a prosecutor cannot serve as a judge on an appeal of a defendant he prosecuted. This is exactly what happened to Mumia. A District Attorney, Ronald Castille, who prosecuted Mumia (and even organized the training of the Philadelphia attorneys on how to exclude Black people from juries), later became a Pennsylvania Supreme Court Judge (with the backing of the Fraternal Order of Police) and, as such, ruled against Mumia at the state Supreme Court level on his appeals—exactly what the new U.S. Supreme Court decision excluded. Mumia's lawyers have filed a new legal action based on this ruling. If it is successful, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court rulings upholding Mumia's conviction would be overturned. But, here's the important thing: no justice comes in this case unless it is forced by an organized, massive movement. The purpose of this action today, on the 35th year since the Philadelphia Police tried to murder Mumia in the street, is to re-ignite the massive movement that saved him from execution, and win his freedom.

Your presence here today means you want to be part of this movement and convince others to join us. Thank you. Free Mumia!

Mumia Wins Federal Court Victory On Hep-C Treatment!

BY CHRIS KINDER

On January 3rd, a federal court granted Mumia Abu-Jamal's petition for immediate and effective treatment for his Hepatitis-C infection, which has hitherto been denied him. The judge struck down Pennsylvania's protocols as "deliberate indifference to serious medical need," said Rachel Wolkenstein, an attorney supporter of Mumia's.

Bret Grote, of the Abolitionist Law Center, and associate attorney Bob Boyle led the case in court. "This is the first case in the country in which a federal court has ordered prison officials to provide an incarcerated patient with the new [Hep-C] medications that came on the market in 2013," said Grote.

This is a rare and important win for innocent political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal in a court system that has routinely subjected him to the "Mumia exception," *i.e.*, a refusal of justice despite court precedents in his favor. Thousands of Hep-C-infected prisoners throughout Pennsylvania and the U.S. stand to benefit from this decision, provided it is upheld.

But, it is up to us to make sure that this decision is not over-turned on appeal—something the State of Pennsylvania will most likely seek.

Hundreds demonstrated in both Philadelphia and Oakland on December 9, 2016, to demand both this Hep-C treatment for prisoners, and "Free Mumia Now!" In Oakland, the December 9th Free Mumia Coalition rallied in downtown and then marched on the Oakland Police Department (OPD) headquarters. The Coalition brought over two dozen groups together to reignite the movement to free Mumia; and now we need your support to expand and build for more actions in this new, and likely very dangerous year for political prisoners.

The background

December 9th is the date in 1981 on which Mumia was shot by a cop, almost killed, and then framed for the murder of Officer Daniel Faulkner, which had already taken place before Mumia arrived on the scene. Mumia was an anti-racist activist and journalist, whose activities and radio reports on police brutality had made him a target of both federal and local cops and politicians.

Mumia's trial before a racist judge was a crime scene in itself, with corrupted and lying "witnesses," honest witnesses not called to appear, faked "evidence" and Mumia himself removed from most of his own trial! His State appeal was held before the same racist judge, and another man who confessed to the Faulkner killing was never called before any court.

Mumia contracted Hepatitis-C from a blood transfusion in the hospital in 1981 after his arrest. Decades later, this long-incubating viral infection exploded into a raft of debilitating secondary symptoms, and into the present threat Mumia faces of cirrhosis of the liver and likely death, unless he receives the newly-available curative treatment. While treating him for the secondary symptoms, the Pennsylvania prison Department Of Corrections has up to now refused the essential cure, due to its cost (while masking this in a litany of excuses.)

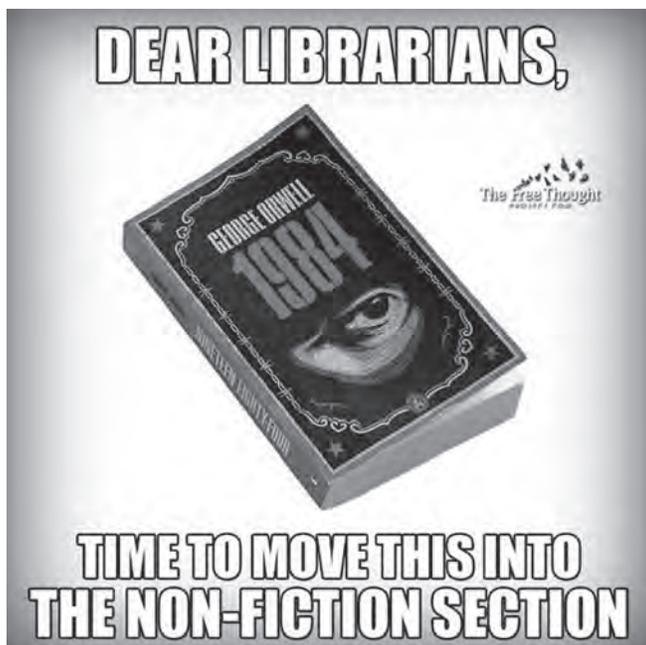
In 1995, mass international demonstrations took place, which succeeded in stopping the threat of immediate execution, which had been leveled against Mumia by the PA governor. And in 1999, Oakland teachers held teach-ins on Mumia and the death penalty, and longshore workers in the ILWU shut down all West Coast ports to free Mumia and massive demonstrations were held. More recently, the Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal has organized demonstrations demanding treatment for prisoners suffering from Hepatitis C and against price-gouging by Gilead Sciences, the maker of the drug Harvoni, which all Hep-C victims need.

Now, we must ramp up all this movement to demand: Treatment for all Hep-C infected prisoners, and Free Mumia Now!

The Labor Action Committee To Free Mumia Abu-Jamal (LAC) urges you to get involved and support the December 9th Coalition.

Contact: Tova, 510-600-5800; Jack, 510-501-7080; or Gerald, 510-417-1252.

—Labor Action Committee To Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, January 4, 2017



Cat On Fire

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

Over half his life, Lorenzo “Cat” Johnson has been held in some of the toughest prisons in Pennsylvania, under some of the worst conditions, often in the hole.

For over 20 years, he has been part of one of the biggest lifer populations in America, people sentenced to death by time—life—forever.

But in 2012, a ray of light shone through the darkness when the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw out his unjust conviction, based on insufficiency of evidence, and ordered his prison doors opened.

A few months later, a great darkness fell when the U.S. Supreme Court, in a rare and almost unprecedented action, without briefs or oral argument, reinstated both his conviction and his life sentence.

Through tears, Cat left his new life, his new wife, his job, and friends and returned to Pennsylvania from his native Yonkers, New York—and walked, willingly, back into a prison cell.

As a teenager, Cat boxed in the ring, before the streets called him. Now as a man in his thirties, Cat laced up for the biggest battle of his life—his Freedom.

His lawyers, a dedicated bunch led by the skillful Mike Wiseman, tore the case apart, and learned some rather astonishing things, like the State’s crack-addicted star witness gave over a-half-dozen statements in the days after the killing of a Harrisburg crack dealer, and even more astonishingly, she was first named as a prime suspect in the murder! (The jury, needless to say, never heard that.)

Those statements? Oh, yeah—they have never been turned over to the defense—not before trial—and not to this date (a blatant violation of *Brady vs. Maryland*, a U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1963, which required pros-

ecutors disclose all evidence favorable to the accused!)

The cops threatened others with murder charges if they didn’t say Cat did it.

The kicker is this—cops and prosecutors knew Cat was out of town when Taraje Williams was killed and that he had nothing to do with it.

Several years ago, a Court tossed his conviction based upon insufficient evidence. Today, his lawyers have uncovered the truth: no evidence of guilt, and overwhelming evidence of his innocence.

He just awaits his day in court.

For more info, check out: www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org

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Write to:
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LorenzoJohnson17932@gmail.com
www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org
Sign his petition and learn more at:
<http://www.freelorenzojohnson.org/sign-the-petition.html>
www.twitter.com/FreeRenz
Contribute to Lorenzo Johnson’s campaign for freedom through JPAY.com code: Lorenzo Johnson DF 1036 PA DOC



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Note to Readers:

Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by a group of 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.



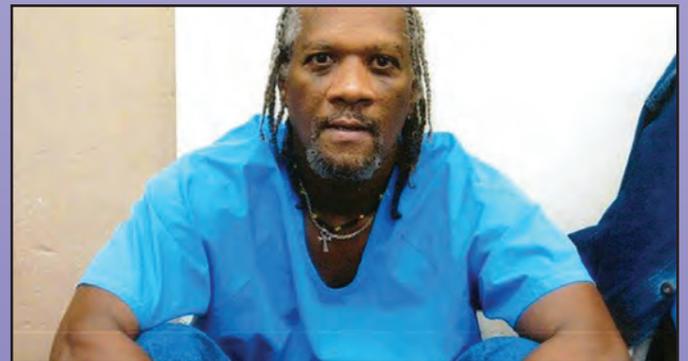


Cuba mobilizes to mourn the passing of Fidel Castro, the Cuban Revolutionary who helped provide food, housing, and education for all Cuban citizens despite five decades of sanctions and blockades by the United States. Read *Fidel: The Proof is in the Pudding* on page 26.

On the Front Cover: ►
 Detail of Detroit Industry - Diego Rivera, 1933.
 Fresco mural. Detroit Institute of Arts. Read *What the World Needs Now is Socialism* on page 2.



Prisoner Undergoes Horrifying Guantanamo-Style Treatment. Read *Bound and Gassed* on Page 57.



Defending your constitutional rights against the racist police and classist power system can get you killed if you do so while being Black. Read *Born in the USA* on page 51.

★ ★ ★ Attention Prison Mail Room: ★ ★ ★

Prisoners retain their free speech rights under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. That means you cannot legally suppress the expression and consideration of ideas. Prison walls do not form a barrier separating prisoners from the protection of the Constitution, according to the *Turner v. Safely* ruling. [482 U.S. 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987)] If you exclude printed matter on an improper basis, or give a false pretext or rationale for its exclusion, because of the ideas expressed in it, you are breaking the law. The prisoner denied access to material he wants to read can bring a civil rights lawsuit against you with cause for seeking punitive damages. In the case of *Police Department Chicago v. Mosley*, 408 U.S. 92, 95, 92 Sct 2286, 2290 (1972) the court found that “[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, subject matter or content.”