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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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YOU CAN'T IGNORE YOUR HISTORY



ALWAYS REMEMBER WHO THEY ARE

A system that perpetually condones the killing of people, without consequence, doesn't need to be revised, it needs to be dismantled!

—Colin Kaepernick

Colin Kaepernick Tweet right after the verdict came down finding Jeronimo Yanez, the killer of Philando Castile, innocent of all charges. Read *NFL's War Against Colin Kaepernick* on page 10.

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Only Way to End Terrorism is to End Capitalism

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

The U.S. and its allies are, by far, the biggest terrorists on the planet. Their imperialist wars, conquests and enforced “austerity” programs in virtually every country on the planet has killed tens-of-millions of innocent people over the years and robustly continues today.

The capitalist class—commanded by U.S. capitalism—are directly responsible not only for the wars they have initiated and are militarily and financially supporting, that have caused terrible destabilization in almost every continent, but they are also responsible for the deaths from catastrophes such as the Grenfell Tower fire; the BP oil spill in the Gulf; the death and displacement from natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, floods, even earthquakes, to name just a few blatant examples of capitalist indifference plaguing the poor across the globe.

They are responsible for the global warming that causes many of these natural disasters as well as the death-toll due to the lack of preventive and rescue services available to victims, and safe building practices.

They are responsible for the masses of refugees fleeing from wars zones that have been initiated by Western capitalism—wars that benefit the U.S. capitalist class most of all.

They have been getting away with these crimes of war and conquest with impunity for generations. War is part and parcel of the very nature of the system of capitalism itself. It has never been a peaceful or just system.

Divide and conquer

The most powerful tool the capitalists have is to convince the working class to blame each other for the very same hardships we all suffer at their hands. This same suffering is evident everywhere.

They have nurtured a world in turmoil because it serves their purpose of misdirecting the anger experienced by the working class away from the real causes of their plight—the theft of the wealth that we workers produce—that goes directly into the pockets of the wealthiest one-hundredth-of-one percent.

In fact, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Jeff Bezos, Amancio Ortega and Mark Zuckerberg are now the five richest men in the world, owning more wealth than half of the world’s population! This is down from eight just a few months ago. (See, “And Then There Were Five,” by Paul Buchheit in this issue.)

Capitalism, at its essence, is in constant competition for the largest share of profits. And U.S. capitalists are at the helm of world capitalist competition and they aim to stay on the top!

Organizing a fighting force to end capitalism

As the world is presented to us by the mass media—owned and controlled by the U.S. commanders of capital—the division in the world’s working class seems insurmountable.

But the reality is working class unity and solidarity is a more powerful force than capital. And that’s what the capitalist class is really terrified of.

So how can we overcome our differences and build the massive force necessary to end capitalism and the strife it brings once and for all?

Capitalism can’t be reformed

First and foremost we must realize that capitalism cannot be reformed. It is a dead-end system for the working class. It’s not a matter of “bad capitalists” against “good capitalists.” The capitalist system itself is designed to enslave the entire working class. It can’t exist otherwise.

We need an organization—an independent party of our own—controlled democratically by the working class that has as its goal to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society under workers’ control, and in our interests, not theirs.

We can’t depend on liberals who claim that capitalism can be reformed—



who claim that there once was a “kinder and gentler capitalism” that we can bring back. There never was a “kinder and gentler” capitalism!

Capitalism was built upon conquest through bloody wars through the ages. Its fodder—indigenous peoples, slaves, serfs and workers—whose blood was, and continues to be, shed for capital’s never-ending accumulation of wealth and power now centered in the U.S.

World War One and Two were just such wars that put the U.S. capitalist class and their allies at the helm of world capital. Tens-of-millions of workers of all ethnicities were and still are being sacrificed in U.S. capital’s continued bloody battle to remain on top.

Building a party capable of combating capitalism’s violence

Only a unified working class can wield the tremendous power necessary to combat capitalist tyranny.

We must become a powerful force, not only in defense of workers everywhere, but as the only combative force capable of overwhelming the violence against us.

In fact, we, in the belly of the beast here in the U.S., have an obligation. We must show, by organizing ourselves into a massive movement against U.S. wars and terrorism, that we are actively fighting against our own capitalist government, and are on the side of workers everywhere.

Right now, we workers manufacture all of capitalism’s weapons—their guns and bombs, both nuclear and conventional. Without us, they would be defenseless. They would have no power to terrorize us any longer. Only we can bring their tyranny to an end!

That’s why we must build a massive, unified, combative working class party independent of, and in solidarity against capitalism, that can finally end capitalism’s long and violent reign against the whole working class, and bring peace, equality and justice for all.

It is up to us—we must lead the way.

And Then There Were Five

Now five men own almost as much wealth as half the world’s population

BY PAUL BUCHHEIT

Last year it was eight men, then down to six, and now almost five.¹

While Americans fixate on Trump, the super-rich are absconding with our wealth, and the plague of inequality continues to grow. An analysis of 2016 data found that the poorest five-tenths of the world population own about \$410 billion in total wealth. As of June 8, 2017, the world’s richest five men owned over \$400 billion in wealth. Thus, on average, each man owns nearly as much as 750 million people.

Why do we let a few people shift great portions of the world’s wealth to themselves?

Most of the super-super-rich are Americans. We the American people created the Internet, developed and funded artificial intelligence, and built a massive transportation infrastructure, yet we let just a few individuals take almost all the credit, along with hundreds-of-billions of dollars.

Defenders of the out-of-control wealth gap insist that all is OK, because after all, America is a meritocracy in which the super-wealthy have earned all they have. They heed the words of Warren Buffett: “The genius of the American economy, our emphasis on a meritocracy and a market system and a rule of law has enabled generation after generation to live better than their parents did.”

But it’s not a meritocracy. Children are no longer living better than their parents did. In the eight years since the recession the Wilshire Total Market valuation has more than tripled, rising from a little over \$8 trillion to nearly \$25 trillion. The great majority of it has gone to the very richest Americans. In 2016 alone, the richest one percent effectively shifted nearly \$4 trillion in wealth away from the rest of the nation

to themselves, with nearly half of the wealth transfer (\$1.94 trillion) coming from the nation’s poorest 90 percent—the middle and lower classes. That’s over \$17,000 in housing and savings per lower-to-middle-class household lost to the super-rich.

A meritocracy? Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos have done little that wouldn’t have happened anyway. All modern U.S. technology started with, and to a great extent continues with, our tax dollars and our research institutes and our subsidies to corporations.

Why do we let unqualified rich people tell us how to live?

In 1975, at the age of 20, Bill Gates founded Microsoft with high school buddy Paul Allen. At the time, Gary Kildall’s CP/M operating system was the industry standard. Even Gates’ company used it. But Kildall was an innovator, not a businessman, and when IBM came calling for an Operating System (OS) for the new IBM Personal Computer (PC), his delays drove the big mainframe company to Gates. Even though the newly established Microsoft company couldn’t fill IBM’s needs, Gates and Allen saw an opportunity, and so they hurriedly bought the rights to another local company’s OS—which was based on Kildall’s CP/M system. Kildall wanted to sue, but intellectual property law for software had not yet been established. Kildall was a maker who got taken.

So Bill Gates took from others to become the richest man in the world. And now, because of his great wealth and the meritocracy myth, many people look to him for solutions in vital areas of human need, such as education and global food production.

Gates on Education: He has promoted galvanic skin response monitors to measure the biological reactions of students, and the videotaping of teachers to evaluate their performances. About schools he said, “The best results have come in cities where the mayor is in charge of the school system. So you have one executive, and the school board isn’t as powerful.”

Gates on Africa: With investments in or deals with Monsanto, Cargill and Merck, Gates has demonstrated his preference for corporate control over poor countries deemed unable to help themselves. But no problem: according to Gates, “By 2035, there will be almost no poor countries left in the world.”

Warren Buffett: Demanding to be taxed at a higher rate (as long as his own company doesn’t have to pay)

Warren Buffett has advocated for higher taxes on the rich and a reasonable estate tax. But his company Berkshire Hathaway has used “hypothetical amounts” to pay its taxes while actually deferring \$77 billion in real taxes.

Jeff Bezos: \$50 billion in less than two years, and fighting taxes all the way

Since the end of 2015 Jeff Bezos has accumulated enough wealth to cover the entire \$50 billion U.S. housing budget, which serves five million Americans. Bezos, who has profited greatly from the Internet and the infrastructure built up over many years by many people with many of our tax dollars, has used tax havens and high-priced lobbyists to avoid the taxes owed by his company.

Mark Zuckerberg: (Sixth richest in world, fourth richest in America)

While Zuckerberg was developing his version of social networking at Harvard, Columbia University students Adam Goldberg and Wayne Ting built a system called Campus Network, which was much more sophisticated than the early versions of *Facebook*. But Zuckerberg had the Harvard name and better financial support.

Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos have done little that wouldn’t have happened anyway. All modern U.S. technology started with, and to a great extent continues with, our tax dollars and our research institutes and our subsidies to corporations.

Now with his billions he has created a charitable foundation, which in reality is a tax-exempt limited liability company, leaving him free to make political donations or sell his holdings, all without paying taxes.

The false promise of philanthropy

Many super-rich individuals have pledged the majority of their fortunes to philanthropic causes. That’s very generous, if they keep their promises. But that’s not really the point.

American billionaires all made their money because of the research and innovation and infrastructure that make up the foundation of our modern technologies. They have taken credit, along with their massive fortunes, for successes that derive from society rather than from a few individuals. It should not be any one person’s decision about the proper use of that wealth. Instead a significant portion of annual national wealth gains should be promised to education, housing, health research, and infrastructure. That is what Americans and their parents and grandparents have earned after a half-century of hard work and productivity.

—AlterNet, June 12, 2017

<http://www.alternet.org/economy/five-richest-men-inequality>

¹ **Bill Gates** is the number one richest for the fourth year in a row, and the richest person in the world for 18 out of the past 23 years. He has a fortune of \$86 billion, up from \$75 billion last year. Amazon’s **Jeff Bezos** had the best year of any person on the planet, adding \$27.6 billion to his fortune; now worth \$72.8 billion, he moved into the top three in the world for the first time, up from number five a year ago.

Warren Buffett had the second-best year, and the biggest gain since Donald Trump was elected president in November 2016. His \$14.8 billion jump in 12 months was enough for him to grab back the number two spot from **Amancio Ortega**, founder of Spanish clothing chain Zara. Ortega’s fortune was up \$4.3 billion since last year, but he still fell to fourth in the world, unable to keep up with the outsize gains of others.

Facebook founder **Mark Zuckerberg** moved up to number five for the first time, after his fortune rose \$11.4 billion in 12 months.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kerryadolan/2017/03/20/forbes-2017-billionaires-list-meet-the-richest-people-on-the-planet/#34838f7962ff>



Trump-Inspired Racist Murders and Counter-Mobilization in Portland

BY BARRY SHEPPARD

Two murders and an attempted murder in Portland, Oregon, on the first day of Ramadan, by a white fascist-minded racist Islamophobe are the latest in a string of hate crimes inspired by Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric, and racist actions since he took office.

Heidi Beirich, Intelligence Project director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which keeps track of hate crimes, said on *Democracy Now!*, "President Trump, whose words in the campaign unleashed against immigrants, against Muslims and others, unleashed a wave of hate crimes and bias incidents, especially right after the election. The SPLC has documented about 900 of them in the first ten days [after the election]."

Since then, such crimes have accelerated.

The Portland murders began when Alt-Right supporter Jeremy Christian, known for racist violence, armed with a knife, accosted two Black teenagers on a commuter train. One of the young women was Muslim, wearing a hijab, the other her non-Muslim friend.

Christian screamed racist and Islamophobic slurs at the women, yelling at them to get off the train and get out of the country. Three white men intervened and tried to stop Christian, who then stabbed two of them to death and gravely wounded a third.

These heroes were Ricky John Best, a 53-year-old Army veteran and Portland city worker; Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, a 23-year-old recent graduate of Reed College in Portland; and Micah David-Cole Fletcher, a 21-year-old poet and Portland State University student. The three were stabbed in the neck. Best and Namkai-Meche were killed, and Fletcher was severely wounded but survived in hospital.

In an emotional interview on *CNN*, 16-year-old Destinee Mangum, one of the young women Christian accosted, said in tears:

"He told us to go back to Saudi Arabia, that we shouldn't be here and to get out of his country. He was just telling us that we basically weren't anything and that we should just kill ourselves....[After the three white heroes intervened] me and my friend, we were going to get off the [train]. And then we turned around while they were fighting, and he just started stabbing. It was just blood everywhere, and we just started running for our lives...."

The best way to oppose the Alt-Right's hate speech and actual violence as has just erupted in Portland is mass mobilization from below, of the exploited, oppressed and their supporters—not reliance on our exploiters and oppressors and their state.

"I just want to say thank you to the people who put their life on the line for us, because they didn't even know us. And they lost their lives because of me and my friend and the way we looked. I just want to say thank you to them and their families and that I appreciate them, because without them, we would be dead right now."

Mangum's Muslim friend is anonymous at least for now, for good reason.

At his arraignment Christian shouted "Free speech or die, Portland. You've

got no safe place. This is America. Get out if you don't like free speech."

A short time later he yelled: "Death to the enemies of America. Death to antifa [anti-fascists]. You call it terrorism. I call it patriotism. Die."

It took days and outrage before the White House issued a perfunctory statement that didn't even mention Islamophobia or the Alt-Right, a motley collection of fascist-minded organizations that are among Trump's outlying support groups.

This all is occurring as the top Republican in Portland, James Buchal, told the *Guardian* that the Republicans could make their own security arrangements rather than relying on city or state police, using Alt-Right armed militia groups like the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters.

According to the SPLC, the Oath Keepers are an extreme right organization of some 10,000 former law officers and army veterans. The Three Percenters were organized to fight the federal government after the election of President Obama.

Buchal recently made a video against "Our enemies" who "want open borders, because they know if they keep the borders open, bring in all sorts of people from Third World countries who have no conception of liberty...it will change this country forever, it will destroy everything that is special about America."

He went on the praise Trump as the bulwark against these "enemies."

Writing in the U.S. *Socialist Worker*, eyewitness reporters in Portland said, "But here is another side of the story beyond the awful stabbings: hundreds-of-thousands of people who shared this city with Ricky Best and Taliesin Namkai-Mechein were horrified by their murder, and many of them want to do something to stand up against hate.



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“The day after the killings, some 1,000 people came out to a hastily organized vigil to honor the heroes who tried to stop a racist. People of all ages and races, including many women in hijab, held candles and left flowers at a makeshift shrine at the [train] station near where the stabbings took place....

“Those working for social justice in Portland won’t forget about this horror. Despite the killings, Alt-Right organizations are still planning to mobilize June 4 for a rally for ‘free speech,’ but a strong and growing coalition of left organizations is building for a counter-rally under the slogan ‘Portland Stands United Against Hate’—to show with our numbers that Portlanders will stand up to violence and racism.”

This is the correct way to fight the right wing. Some are supporting the Portland Mayor’s proposal to ban the Alt-Right rally. But this goes in the wrong direction for a number of reasons.

First we cannot trust the capitalist state to fight the right. A key element of the state are its armed wings, breeding grounds for groups like the Oath Keepers. Moreover, it is the capitalist system itself that gains from and supports Islamaphobia, including from the very top in Washington, using it to

“justify” its endless wars in the Mideast and North Africa.

Black Lives Matter has exposed that institutionalized racism and violence is alive and well in the U.S., and is furthered and protected by the capitalist state.

It is capitalism and its state that nurtures and creates the far right. In an extreme crisis, the capitalists will even support fascism, as they did in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal.

Second, the left should not support any capitalist state ban on free speech. World and U.S. history has amply demonstrated that such bans, even

when originally proposed against the right, always are used a hundredfold more against the workers and oppressed. In this case, it plays into the hands of the Alt-Right, whose June 4 rally is called to defend their “free speech” to divert attention from their hate speech.

The best way to oppose the Alt-Right’s hate speech and actual violence as has just erupted in Portland is mass mobilization from below, of the exploited, oppressed and their supporters—not reliance on our exploiters and oppressors and their state.

It is capitalism and its state that nurtures and creates the far right. In an extreme crisis, the capitalists will even support fascism, as they did in Italy, Germany, Spain and Portugal.



An anti-Trump rally in Portland after a May 26 hate crime by an alt-right racist.

Vietnam Revisited During Trump's Bonkers Brinkmanship

By JACK HEYMAN

I returned to Vietnam in April, having not been there since the war, nearly 50 years ago. I'd sailed there as a seaman in the National Maritime Union (NMU) on a cargo ship carrying war materiel from the naval ammo base in Port Chicago, California. Having been active in the antiwar movement before the merchant marine, I was reluctant to go to Vietnam. Popular chants in the antiwar demonstrations in the '60s were "Hell No, We Won't Go!" and "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh, the NLF [National Liberation Front] is Gonna Win!" At Penn State I burned my draft card in 1965 along with several others including Andy Stapp, who had organized the antiwar American Serviceman's Union. That same year Marxist philosopher Isaac Deutscher, underscoring the power of the working class, said in a speech at Columbia University that he'd give a thousand of the mushrooming student antiwar protests for just one, solid workers strike against the war in Vietnam.

A Trotskyist seaman in the union convinced me that an individualistic act of refusing to sail to Vietnam wouldn't stop the war, that revolutionaries should go with the working class youth, that our task was to organize within the military and the trade unions to fight to stop the war. My father's family was steel mill workers from Steelton, Pennsylvania, and my mother's family had fled the Nazis in Vienna. Her mother who I adored was a socialist. So, it wasn't difficult to convince me of a working class perspective. Soon, a seaman's job on the S.S. Hoosier State was on the board at the union hall in San Francisco, destination: Vietnam. I took it.

While on duty on lookout one night on the bow halfway across the pond, I heard on my short wave radio that Ho Chi Minh had died. At the time he was

my hero. So, I cut a piece of black cloth the next day and wore it on my shirt. When questioned about it by crewmembers, I explained that I was honoring Ho Chi Minh, the "George Washington of Vietnam" who led the independence struggle against the Japanese in WWII, then the French colonialists and now the American imperialists. It was my initial foray into organizing against such wars in the trade union movement.

Crewmembers responded with interest. But my biggest surprise came from a bar girl at the Peace Hotel in Danang who questioned me about the black ribbon. I told her it was to commemorate Uncle Ho, leader of the liberation forces. She said, "You, an American, support Viet Cong?" Then she leaned over and whispered, "I give money to VC."

Later I learned that Vietnamese Communists—both Stalinists and Trotskyists—worked together in the 1930's, but later Ho's Viet Minh arrested and killed Trotskyists. After WWII, Ho's Viet Minh welcomed the British troops to Vietnam and sought U.S. recognition of their independence. Instead, Truman sent U.S. freighters, manned by unionized merchant seamen, to transport French troops to re-colonize the newly-declared independent republic of Vietnam in collaboration with the British and defeated Japanese military. These imperialist coalition forces bombed Haiphong and Hanoi to pave the way for re-colonization that provoked the war of national liberation and social revolution.

Little did I know in 1969 that NMU merchant seamen on board those ships were the first to protest the "imperialist policies of foreign governments...in Vietnam" in 1945. The NMU, then the largest maritime union with 100,000

members, and the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), both influenced by the Communist Party, had played a leading role in the militant Congress of Industrial Unions (CIO).

But it wasn't until May Day 2008, forty years later, that I experienced the power of that class struggle strategy, mobilizing the working class against imperialist war. The ILWU shutdown all West Coast ports to protest the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was the union's Vietnam veterans who spoke passionately for strike action that inspired other union members and prevailed at the union meeting despite contrary sentiments of the union leadership. That illegal strike was the first by American workers against an imperialist U.S. war.

Carpet bombing, napalm, Agent Orange and massacres

When I arrived in Hanoi last month, I had arranged to meet former U.S. Army Military Intelligence Specialist Chuck Searcy, now a leading member of Veterans for Peace in Vietnam. The day before we met at the Metropole Hotel (where Joan Baez stayed during the American Christmas bombing of 1972). He lives in Hanoi, speaks Vietnamese and coordinates work with Project Renew to remove unexploded ordinances (UXOs). Just the day before a 500 lb. unexploded bomb had been found in Quang Tri province between Hue, the ancient capital, and the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ.) It was safely removed by the Vietnamese mobile team of Project Renew.

The U.S. dropped more than seven million tons of bombs on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, more than twice the amount dropped in Europe and Asia in all of World War II. Many remain unexploded. Chuck Searcy said

that the equivalent of eight atomic bombs were dropped around the DMZ. Over 40,000 Vietnamese, 20,000 Laotians and a similar number of Cambodians have been killed by UXOs since 1975, the end of the war. During the American war in Southeast Asia, three million people were killed in Vietnam, one million in Laos and another one million in Cambodia, a total of five million people. The Vietnam Veterans War Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. has 58,307 names of U.S. military killed in Vietnam and is 247 feet long. If a wall were built for those Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians killed in the war it would be over four miles long.

On top of the barbaric use of the toxic defoliant dioxin or Agent Orange 400,000 people were killed or maimed, a half-a-million children for over three generations have been born with serious birth defects and two million people suffer from cancer and other serious illnesses. The Veterans for Peace (VFP) are doing a yeoman's job of cleaning up that poison in the Danang area.

Perhaps what most aroused anti-U.S. anger around the world was the horrific images of children running naked after being seared by napalm and the pictures of the My Lai massacre with bloody bodies of dead babies, mothers, children and elderly strewn along a dirt road, a horror story exposed by Seymour Hersh. Nick Turse's well-researched book *Kill Anything That Moves* from recently declassified Pentagon files on the American war in Vietnam, documents how such massacres occurred all over South Vietnam. The Pentagon demanded higher body counts of the Viet Cong. Pentagon brass considered anyone living in VC-controlled villages, babies included, as foes. None of the Pentagon brass was ever charged with war crimes. All of these war crimes are meticulously and graphically documented in the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, originally called

the American War Crimes Museum. The name was changed to placate American tourists.

The bold January 1968 Tet Offensive, by Vietcong sappers and militia along with the North Vietnamese Army, launched a coordinated attack in several cities that belied the Pentagon propaganda that the U.S. was winning the war. In the Tet Offensive the U.S. Embassy in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) was occupied by the Viet Cong for several hours, according to Chuck Searcy who was based there. The U.S. military and South Vietnamese army lost control of several cities temporarily. Hue was held for a month by insurgents, many of them university students. It only fell after a massive U.S. bombardment of the ancient capital, destroying much of that archeological site.

The Vietnam Veterans War Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. has 58,307 names of U.S. military killed in Vietnam and is 247 feet long. If a wall were built for those Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians killed in the war it would be over four miles long.

Ironically, one of the first casualties of the American war in Vietnam occurred in 1964 in Halong Bay, which nowadays is full of tour boats. After President Johnson claimed (falsely as it was later shown) that North Vietnam attacked an American destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin, the U.S. "retaliated" by bombing the main port in Haiphong and nearby beautiful Cat Ba Island in Halong Bay, which is of no military significance.

If Air Force General Curtis LeMay had his way, he declared, the U.S. would have won the war by using nuclear bombs in Vietnam. Before that he had advocated dropping atomic bombs on Cuba and North Korea. No wonder North Korea felt the need to develop nuclear arms for defense. In the 1968 elections, LeMay (Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*) ran for Vice President with racist Alabama Governor George Wallace.

Kicking the "Vietnam Syndrome"

Massive protests erupted and grew to the end of the war and afterwards leaving a strong distaste of wars for empire. George H. W. Bush inveighed against the "Vietnam Syndrome," honing the American sword for the next war. Over a hundred-years-ago Mark Twain, a fervent member of the Anti-Imperialist League, had warned in the wake of the Spanish American War that democracy and empire are irreconcilable. Karl Marx had already analyzed capitalism's highest stage of imperialism, recognizing that as a natural consequence of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, imperialist countries are compelled to seek new markets through coercive trade agreements or war, if necessary. At the museum in the village of My Lai, there's a film on that massacre pointing out the relevance of the Vietnam War to the wars in the Middle East today.

While I was in Hanoi, President "Make the Empire Great Again" Trump reversed his electoral "isolationist" foreign policy after increasing the military budget. He hitched onto the trajectory of liberal hawk Hillary Clinton. In rapid succession he sent a flurry of Tomahawk cruise missiles hitting an air base in Syria used by the Russians while accusing, without any evidence, the Assad regime of a deadly chemical attack on civilians in ISIS-occupied territory. Then the U.S. military dropped the "Mother Of All Bombs" on ISIS tunnels in Afghanistan, where the Taliban control half of the country.

Now, he's threatening nuclear-armed North Korea with a U.S. naval armada. Elected Democrats in Congress supported the bombing of Syria, were essentially silent on the "Mother of All Bombs" dropped on Afghanistan and criticized Trump for misstating that he was sending the U.S. "naval armada" toward North Korea when it was heading away, implying that he was not acting sufficiently militaristic enough against a nuclear-armed country. Over three million Koreans died in the other American war in East Asia.

President Eisenhower warned Americans about the danger of the "military-industrial complex." But this is the same Eisenhower who prepared the Bay of Pigs invasion (carried out by Democrat Kennedy) in a failed attempt to crush the Cuban Revolution. In fact, it is not just a particular pressure group but U.S. imperialism that has carried out military interventions continuously since the end of WW II, under Democrats and Republicans alike, using the cover of "American exceptionalism." The Pentagon now has American troops stationed in 150 countries. Is it any wonder when you *Google* which country is the greatest threat to world peace the answer is the United States? (Except for *Breitbart!*)

Is Vietnam a failing revolution?

When the Vietnamese Revolution triumphed in 1975, it was not only a civil war of national reunification but also a social revolution replacing the U.S. puppet capitalist regime in South Vietnam with what Trotskyists call a deformed workers state, a social gain but a bureaucratically-run state. It was a stunning defeat for imperialism. Liberals and Nixon cried "No more Vietnams," but the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution inspired struggles from southern Africa to Central America.

Author Viet Thanh Nguyen's novel *The Sympathizer* portrays American exceptionalism as delusional. His protagonist is a Vietnamese

Communist counterintelligence agent in the U.S. after the victorious Vietnam Revolution. Ultimately, he himself is imprisoned and tortured in Vietnam by the Stalinist regime. His jailers sadistically interrogate him, "What is more important than independence and freedom?" Viet shows the dark, repressive side of the Vietnamese state, but he maintains that revolution is still necessary. So, what is happening in Vietnam today?

Karl Marx had already analyzed capitalism's highest stage of imperialism, recognizing that as a natural consequence of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, imperialist countries are compelled to seek new markets through coercive trade agreements or war

When I was in Danang in 1969, soldiers and seamen used to take R & R on China Beach, hang out at the bars and drink Saigon tea with the bar girls. Today, it has been replaced with miles and miles of upscale hotels on China Beach being built for wealthy tourists. It's a new American invasion, this time not by troops but by capital. Surprisingly, the mantra of many young Vietnamese who didn't live through the war is "We need to forget about the past and look to the future." As the Spanish philosopher George Santayana remarked, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

I talked to Le Phan Linh, president of the 30,000 member Vietnam National Shipping Lines Workers'

Union (VWU). I asked why crews on the tourist boats in Halong Bay and the Mekong River were not being organized by the union. (The communist-led NMU was begun with a strike on a passenger ship, then organized all ships.) He said his union only organized cargo vessels and if seamen on tourist vessels wanted a union they could join a local union. The seamen onboard the passenger vessels that I talked to had no union and some didn't even know what a trade union was. Mr. Le explained that Vietnam was a poor country, that foreign investment was important. Apparently, workers in the tourist industry—on tour boats and luxury hotels—are not being organized.

The Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) is the only union federation recognized by the government and the restrictive labor code makes it difficult to strike. Yet, over the last 12 years there have been militant, wildcat and sit-down strikes. The Australian *Green Left Weekly* (December 10, 2003) poignantly reported: "In Vietnam's precarious balance between mobilizing private and foreign capital to help develop the war-ruined country and trying to maintain a dominant state-owned sector and a 'socialist orientation,' the role of organized labor is crucial in stopping 'market forces' from undermining labor standards."

In 2006, 350,000 workers were involved in 541 strikes in factories mainly owned by foreign capitalists from Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. Five years later wildcat strikes over wages and working conditions nearly doubled to 981. Even the U.S. State Department conceded that the Vietnamese government tolerated strikes and not only didn't punish the strikers but often mediated contract settlements in the workers' favor. In some cases the government even penalized employers for illegal practices that provoked the strikes.

Now, the Vietnamese government is caught in a dilemma. It seeks to attract foreign investment based on low wages and political stability. Yet, with the average monthly wage of \$145, lower than most South East Asian countries, workers are organizing to increase their wages and working conditions. With the run-up to the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the state harassed and imprisoned some strike leaders. Independent unions are seen as a threat.

I asked why in Cuba socialized medicine and free education are the hallmarks of their revolution, yet in Vietnam workers had to pay for healthcare and schooling. He explained that there were major changes in the Vietnamese economy in the 1990s, the period of enhanced neo-liberal capitalist trade agreements. The Communist Party of Vietnam decided to follow that path and attract foreign capital in an attempt ostensibly to raise the low standard of living of workers. Yet, they don't tax foreign investors sufficiently to cover the expenses of healthcare, education and other social needs for fear of discouraging investments. Instead workers complain that they have to shoulder the cost of these social needs, which should be free under socialism. Moreover, the Vietnam government favors the TPP that was resoundingly rejected by American workers. Such glaring contradictions will have to be resolved in favor of the working class or the social gains of the Vietnamese revolution will be torn asunder not by brute military force but by the capitalist behemoth.

Jack Heyman, a retired longshoreman, is a member of the Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal.

—Counter Punch, May 1, 2017

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/05/01/vietnam-revisited-during-trumps-bonkers-brinkmanship/>

NFL's War Against Colin Kaepernick

Leading media members are carrying on a disinformation campaign against the greatest political lightning rod in sports.

BY DAVE ZIRIN

We have heard a farcical parade of excuses by NFL owners and executives for why free-agent quarterback Colin Kaepernick remains unemployed. "He's not 100 percent committed." "He's more concerned with activism." "He's a distraction." "He will only sign with a team if he starts." "He wants too much money." Even, "I am concerned about his conditioning now that he is a vegetarian" (Real NFL players, if you haven't heard, floss their teeth with steak gristle and drink testosterone shakes drained fresh from a bull's balls.)

Their foot-massagers in the media—especially much of the team at Peter King's "Monday Morning Quarterback" page at *Sports Illustrated*—have dutifully repeated these assertions with metronomic regularity.

Yet as each of these claims has been debunked by journalists actually communicating with Kaepernick and his people, they all continue to be reiterated. In other words, what is happening is a cycle of disinformation, carried out by media members who might as well wear the NFL brand tattooed on the small of their backs.

I have spoken with Kaepernick, and I can say that he wants to play. He is training six days a week, and he is not holding out for money. He simply wants a camp invite. As lesser back-up quarterbacks continue to be signed, his pariah status has become a spectacle without precedent. This was captured perfectly in a bit of research from *Bleacher Report's* Mike Freeman, who tweeted, "144 quarterbacks have thrown 200 or more passes in the year when they turned 29. 143 were on NFL rosters when they turned 30. Kaepernick is the only one not."

The last refuge for those reporters who are part of this disinformation cam-

paign, like this embarrassing and much-ridiculed *Twitter* storm from *Sports Illustrated's* Andy Benoit, is that "He simply isn't very good. Study the tape!" Another *Sports Illustrated* Monday Morning Quarterback journalist, Albert Breer, has beat the gong consistently that "Level of play is the No. 1 reason for Colin Kaepernick[s] being unemployed." (If these names are familiar, Benoit was the football writer who said that women's sports weren't worth watching, and Albert Breer is the Red Sox fan who brayed last month that he believed Baltimore Oriole Adam Jones was lying about being called "n—er" at Breer's beloved Fenway Park.)

I have interviewed several football folk who have "studied the tape," and they say otherwise. *Bleacher Report's* lead scout Doug Farrar said to me, "As someone who has analyzed him back to his time at Nevada, I can tell you that Colin Kaepernick still belongs in the NFL—at the very least as a high-level backup, but more realistically as a starter, most likely in the mid-to-low 20s based on scheme fit. No, Kaepernick doesn't always play from the pocket with ideal efficiency, but the story about him as a disaster in the pocket is a canard. ...I'll say this with certainty—Colin Kaepernick can still start in the NFL, and the fact that he isn't on a team for football reasons alone strains credulity."

As the rationalizations for his pariah-status pileup, the latest is perhaps the most gobsmacking. Seahawk coach Pete Carroll, if you can get your head around this, met with Kaepernick and said that he was simply too good for them to sign. Carroll said, "He's a starter in this league. We have a starter, but he's a starter in this league."

The logic of this statement, in a league where quarterbacks go down for several games or longer with regularity, is imbecilic. Equally risible is who the Seahawks signed to be their new backup: someone named Austin Davis who has 13 career touchdown passes and 12 interceptions and didn't play last season. (In contrast, Kaepernick has 72 TDs passes and 30 picks and took a team to the Super Bowl.) Let's not pick on Davis. Former New York Jet Ryan Fitzpatrick was signed as a backup by Tampa Bay. In one game last season, Fitzpatrick had more interceptions—six—than Kaepernick had all season: four. The list of awful quarterbacks with jobs is long, and each one a slap in the face to Kaepernick's impressive career, his sterling locker-room reputation and the idea that the league is any kind of a meritocracy.

The truth is ugly as sin. The NFL is denying Colin Kaepernick employment not because he isn't "good enough" but because he is being shut out for the crime of using his platform to protest the killing of Black kids by police. This makes the league's right-wing billionaire owners' silk boxers bunch up.

NFL owners don't make pariahs out of players who beat women or face accusations of murder. As dutifully printed and tweeted without commentary by *Sports Illustrated's* Peter King, New York Giants owner John Mara said that he had received "letters" (letters that no one at *Sports Illustrated* has seen) showing that fan reaction makes signing Kaepernick impossible. He said this a year after he signed his kicker Josh Brown to a multiyear deal despite seeing detailed and horrific reports about how Brown beat his wife, but Kaepernick's taking a knee during the anthem was a bridge too far.

Kaepernick's pariah status is about sending a shot across the bow at every political athlete—particularly Black athletes—that they better toe the line.

The owners are again sending the message—just like when they tried to "influence" research on the effects of brain injuries in the sport—that the lives of players simply do not matter to the National Football League.

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The big mystery is whether what is happening is an old-school "blackballing" or if this is a conscious and coordinated campaign. Former NFL player Eric Davis implied strongly that he thought that the NFL had contacted the Seahawks and told them not to sign Kaepernick. If this turns out to be true, we are no longer in the realm of blackballing. We are talking about collusion. That could mean lawsuits. Not just ordinary lawsuits, but nine-figure law-

suits. Major League Baseball had to pay out \$280 million in 1990, when it was found guilty of collusion, and anytime you're dealing with the closed market of professional sports leagues, with their myriad antitrust provisions, collusion penalties can cost a fortune.

But I don't think that Colin Kaepernick is going to go the litigation route. At least not now. He loves this sport and he wants to play. Only two questions remain: Will he get signed by a team when a quarterback inevitably goes down to injury, and will his name, until he's on a roster, become synonymous with the silencing of the political athlete?

If an NFL player wants to speak out after the police murder of an unarmed child like Tamir Rice or after another racist killing, will teammates and agents tell him to be quiet for fear that he will be "Kaepernicked?" I don't know the answer to the first question, but I feel very confident about the second one. Colin Kaepernick will be remembered as an inspiration. The reporters who have thrown dirt on him will be remembered only as the 21st-century iteration of the kind of racism that outspoken Black athletes have always had to face.

—*The Nation*, June 8, 2017

<https://www.thenation.com/article/nfls-war-colin-kaepernick/>



Thinking About the Brain

Thinking about changing the world

BY NAYVIN GORDON

Albert Einstein said, “The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking, it cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” Changing our thinking requires an understanding of how our brains work. Scientific research has led to the discovery that our thinking brain is strongly influenced by our primitive emotional brain, known as the limbic system, which evolved from our apelike ancestors. If we wish to change our thinking so as to create a different world we need to understand the influences of our limbic system on our thinking. This is the key to understanding why all progressive movements seeking to free themselves from domination have ultimately resulted in a new class of dominators. The last 6,000 years of history can attest to the long line of economic systems that have allowed a tiny, selfish minority to subjugate and exploit the vast majority of humanity. This has been a constant feature of the top down economic systems: Slavery, Feudalism and Corporate Capitalism.

Previous movements for political and economic equality have “failed to see that human hierarchical tendencies are simply too strong...those entrusted with authority may try to aggrandize their power, even if they are working for the common good.”¹ The respected anthropologist Christopher Boehm states, “Humans lived 400,000 years as egalitarian hunter gatherers and they were utter realists about human nature. Instinctively they comprehended the need for eternal political vigilance and the need for force in the hands of the rank-and-file as a means of controlling the self aggrandizing tendencies of their leading citizens.”²

Mankind’s natural empathy drove the need to suppress the aggressive egoism of our “apelike despotic nature.”³

The seat of empathy in the brain’s limbic system is established early in life. Infants’ pro-social behavior can be identified at less than two years of age.⁴ The vast majority of human brains have an active empathic center that allows them to be sensitive to the feelings, thoughts and experiences of others. Despotic tendencies are the result of brains that have defective empathy.⁵ A brain that fails to register other peoples’ pain tends to manipulate others for personal profit, money, or power. Such Individuals are typically selfish and prefer authoritarian social systems. Such a brain might explain how for example, at a Presidential Republican Party debate September 12, 2011, after a question was raised about letting a critically ill 30-year-old-man without health insurance die, a chorus of voices in the crowd shouted out—“Yeah! Let him die!” Brain studies also demonstrate⁶ that most people have healthy empathy centers, and prefer to live in a more egalitarian society.⁷ Such a society is dependent on controlling despotic tendencies.

When hunter-gatherers became farmers 10,000 years ago, populations expanded, and the ability of the rank-and-file to control the one percent who seeks to dominate the rest of us unfortunately weakened. The one percent manipulated themselves into positions of authority and dominance.⁸ These individuals had a keen understanding of certain tendencies in the human brain, which they were able to manipulate to consolidate and maintain their hierarchical power. Over the last few decades scientists have discovered that the human brain has tendencies for status, disgust and moral corruption.

Having status, a more privileged social position, can activate areas of the primitive human brain. Brain imaging evidence supports the role of the lim-

bic system and other brain areas in human social rank processing. Social rank is a brain-based system. There is “a neural basis for the high motivational value of status.”⁹ The primitive human brain’s emotional center can be so drawn toward status that it will even forego economic advantage. Our position in social hierarchies strongly influences motivation. Studies have shown that both in brain activity and behavior, people place higher importance on social status than money.¹⁰

When concerned about social status the brain’s emotional center, in the limbic system is most active. Brain activity in the emotional center is also correlated with strong belief in racial superiority and economic inequalities. When social status is threatened the emotional center of fear is activated. Staying on top of the social ladder is as important to the brain as an addict staying high on drugs. The brain registers a satisfaction in the knowledge that there is another social group below. Studies of the brain have shown that one’s empathy is “biased toward inferior status compared with superior status individuals.”¹¹ The brain tolerates the lower level of exploitation as a relative benefit. Who wants to be on the bottom of the social ladder? Social status perpetuates the dangerous falsehood that some people are less worthy than others. If the status of women were to improve with equal pay and benefits, most men’s families would benefit. Yet the allure of men’s social status outweighs the economic gains and restricts their support for women’s equality. Similarly, white worker’s racism has often prevented their unity with Black workers even when their own economic situation would benefit. The alternative of recognizing our common interests-empathy is weakened by the primitive brain’s allure for social status.

Not only does the growth of social status weaken our natural solidarity for our fellow human beings, it also destroys the physical and mental health of those down the social ladder.¹²

Brain studies show that moral disgust or indignation activates brain areas that connect to emotional areas of the brain in the limbic system. When a social group is identified with an object of disgust, it “throws up strong emotional barriers to empathy.”¹³ Such historical examples as: Nazis depicting Jews as cockroaches or Black people as apes and Muslims as terrorists. “Our moral disgust/indignation brain system is the source of prejudice, stereotyping and sometimes outward aggression.”¹⁴

Today’s hierarchical societies continually utilize mass propaganda systems to reinforce ideologies and political views attached to certain groups on the basis of their sex, race, religion, ethnicity or nationality.

Social hierarchy also has negative effects on those higher up the social ladder. Brains become ethically compromised by their positions of dominance. “Holding high ranking positions makes people less likely to engage in principled dissent.”¹⁵ Those in high authority such as, politicians, bankers and C.E.O.s of corporations often fail to see unethical practices as being wrong in the first place. Their brains become morally compromised. Witness the media’s endless parade of corruption cases. There is a brain-based truth to the well-known saying that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”¹⁶

A study in *Scientific American* stated that psychiatric attributes such as lack of empathy and selfishness were very common in business leaders. This speaks to what it takes to succeed in today’s American corporate business world.¹⁷ Corporations by their very nature demonstrate a lack of empathy, as they tend to operate solely in the interest of their shareholder’s profits,

not the greater needs of society.¹⁸ We have clearly lost the ability our ancestors had to control the despots and dominators in our midst.

What can be done to contain and manage the small minority of people who are driven by selfish motives and who helped create economic systems that perpetuate our intrinsic brain tendencies, which weaken our natural solidarity? “It is the central question social movements have failed to sufficiently study.”¹⁹

What can be done to attain and maintain a profoundly egalitarian society?

It is imperative that we acknowledge human nature.

We must accept the need for eternal political vigilance and the need for force in the hands of the rank-and-file, to identify, expose, isolate, contain or punish those who wish to dominate, manipulate or exploit us.

We can prevent the stimulation of status-based brain systems by abolishing social ladders and maintain strict egalitarianism in our organizations and decision-making processes.

We can reprogram brain centers by cultivating cultural and personal values of empathy within an egalitarian economic, political and social system.

Dr. Nayvin Gordon has been a Family Physician in California for 40 years. He has written many articles on Politics and Health.

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Grenfell—A Call to Action

BY ANDREW BURGIN

The fire at the Grenfell tower block was an entirely avoidable tragedy. Many people have died and dozens were injured and hundreds made homeless. We do not yet know the true extent of the deaths. It is a heartbreaking situation and we in Left Unity extend our deepest sympathies to the bereaved and injured and solidarity to the survivors.

The fire fighters who fought the blaze say that they have never seen such a fire in many decades of their work. The fire took hold quickly, travelling up the height of the 24-floor block in less than half-an-hour. The fire fighters showed the most incredible bravery in going time and again into an inferno trying to reach people trapped in the upper floors of the block. We salute them.

Residents desperate to save their children threw them from the block. There was one report of a baby thrown from the fourth floor who was caught safely by those outside. The baby survived, but we do not know yet about the rest of the family. The outpouring of support and help from ordinary people has been tremendous and leads by example, of how our establishment should be responding to such a terrible human tragedy.

There needs to be a full public inquiry into the causes of this terrible fire leading to action with no delay. What is immediately clear is that the recommendations of a report commissioned into the fire at Lakanal House in Camberwell in 2009 have not been actioned. We need to know why. The Tories have obstructed the introduction of sprinkler systems into tower blocks. They need to be held to account.

Moreover, building regulations have not been revised for 11 years. The block had undergone major refurbish-

ment with the addition of polyethylene cladding, which was added to the block for aesthetic reasons. This cladding is certain to be one of the main subjects of the investigation as it was a cheaper, less flame-resistant version, which apparently allowed the fire to spread quickly. The concerns of the residents over fire safety were repeatedly ignored by the management company responsible for the building. The single escape stairwell was in a dilapidated condition. The fire alarms did not function adequately and could not be heard in the flats themselves. The advice to residents to stay put in the event of fire undoubtedly cost many their lives.

The people who died have not died in an accident, but in a wholly avoidable tragedy for which people have to be held to account. We have to press for criminal charges for corporate manslaughter for those responsible for the fire at Grenfell. That should include those who sat on reports, ignored tenants' legitimate concerns and did not take action because of cost.

This was a social housing block with a working class residency. There is no doubt that had the tenants of luxury blocks of flats raised such concerns as those raised by the Grenfell they would have been listened to more seriously.

The working class in this country is treated with contempt no more so than in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. This is a hugely rich borough, which claimed the refurbishments of the block had to be carried out with the residents *in situ* because it could not afford to house them elsewhere even on a temporary basis. Like other boroughs in London, there is a desire to socially cleanse London of its working class inhabitants. Part of the reason given for the cladding was to make the block less displeasing to the eye for tenants of luxury blocks nearby. The borough has to re-house the residents of Grenfell. They cannot be left in B and Bs for months on end. The block must be re-built with the same care and attention as the luxury blocks nearby. No doubt today even in the wake of these deaths there will be speculators, developers and private landlords working out how they can profit from this disaster. We cannot let this happen.

Following the fire, Theresa May made a private visit to the site. No press or television cameras were allowed to cover her visit and she met with no survivors. She continued her *in camera* premiership showing no respect and a good deal of cowardice in her action. The reason given by the *BBC* was that she feared receiving an angry response from residents had she met them. We guess that would have been the least of it. There is a deep, deep anger not only among those that have survived but in the whole community and well beyond.

Millions of people share that anger. They understand how the establishment and the rich in this country treat them with contempt. This understanding found its expression in the recent general election with the emergence of

Jeremy Corbyn as the real leader in this country. Corbyn made a public visit to Grenfell in the full glare of the media. People understand and believe that he will get to the bottom of this tragedy and not try to cover it over as the Tories will.

Grenfell is a symptom of our age and the burnt out shell of the tower block a monument to Tory Britain. The people who died have not died in an accident, but in a wholly avoidable tragedy for which people have to be held to account. We have to press for criminal charges for corporate manslaughter for those responsible for the fire at Grenfell. That should include those who sat on reports, ignored tenants' legitimate concerns and did not take action because of cost.

We can no longer go on as usual. There are countless deaths in this country because of benefit sanctions, because of pollution and poor air quality. Austerity has taken a terrible toll on working people while the rich have benefited enormously.

We have to make sure the residents of Grenfell receive justice and proper compensation for all that they have suffered.

The huge anger over Grenfell is growing and it threatens to sweep away this government. We have to work to make sure it does and that it is replaced by one whose central concern is that of social justice.

For the many not the few.

—*Left Unity*, June 16, 2017

<http://leftunity.org/grenfell-a-call-to-action/>



British Elections: Corbyn Upsurge

BY ROGER SILVERMAN

June 10, 2017—We are living in the most volatile of times. As the relatively stable prevailing world order of the last few decades passes away, sudden shocks and sharp swings to right and left rock one country after another. The latest example of this is yesterday's general election in Britain, the strangest in its long history.

The first surprise was the fact that it took place at all. It was proclaimed on a mere random whim by the incumbent Prime Minister, Theresa May. She had only taken office less than a year ago, in the whirlwind aftermath of a previous bombshell, the totally unexpected referendum victory of the maverick jingoistic Brexit faction of the establishment.

Days of British Empire

In the old days of the British Empire in the 19th century, it used to be said that the British ruling class was accustomed to planning for decades and even centuries ahead. This befitted the needs of the world's dominant power, hovering and balancing between rival foes and allies in its eternal quest for riches, power, prestige and stability. In its hobbled status after the Second World War as a subordinate of U.S. imperialism, it enjoyed severely reduced margins for maneuver which limited its horizons to a couple of years at most. By now, however, its political agents can see no further than their own noses, operating from day to day with no more than a makeshift box of improvised underhand tricks.

Brexit referendum

Thus, in an act of supreme irresponsibility, in response to unscrupulous hollow chauvinistic critics of his concessions to the European Union—the cheap populists of UKIP (United Kingdom Independent Party) and the Tory party's own lower ranks—the previous Old Etonian “toff” prime minister

David Cameron had frivolously gambled away the whole strategic interests of his class by rashly fobbing them off with the promise of a referendum, without having the slightest inkling of how to win it. He lost the referendum, and the very next day he simply resigned and walked away, leaving his ministers to clear up the mess.

The highest circles of British capitalism know that their best interests lie in remaining in the EU, which after all offers them free access to lucrative markets and a ready supply of cheap labor. But Cameron's successor Theresa May, previously a Remainer, dared not challenge the *clique* of cynical media magnates who manipulate “public opinion,” and overnight became a champion of a “hard Brexit.”

May is no Margaret Thatcher

May tries hard to model herself on the Tory 1980s icon Margaret Thatcher—a decisive leader of her class, who had single-handedly privatized whole swathes of the economy, destroyed its manufacturing base and ruthlessly tamed the trade unions. It was a laughable facade. Mimicking Thatcher's shrill voice and imperious tone, but lacking any trace of her strategic vision or willpower, May looks like nothing more than a pantomime puppet, a cardboard cut-out parody of the “iron lady.”

Finding herself precariously perched in the chair of prime minister, May insisted that she would remain in office at least until her first term expired in 2020; there would be no election. She reduced herself to constantly parroting hollow platitudes (“Brexit means Brexit,” “no deal is better than a bad deal,” “strong and stable government”....) But opinion polls were giving the Tories a huge lead of up to 25 percentage points, translating to a landslide majority of 100-150. After

repeating time and again that she would not call a new election, May impulsively yielded to the temptation of an easy landslide victory, justifying her opportunist U-turn with feeble waffle about the need for a “strong mandate” ahead of the coming Brexit negotiations. Lacking any clear program and fearful of exposing her emptiness to the glare of public scrutiny, May then locked herself away in hiding, shunning public exposure, refusing to participate in TV debates, addressing only secretly convened “public meetings” staged in front of sycophantic hand-picked audiences.

Corbyn: Labor’s working class traditions reviving

Meanwhile, a newly revived and radicalized Labor Party was flexing its muscles. Following Labor’s second successive defeat in the 2015 general election, the left Labor MP Jeremy Corbyn had won the Labor leadership on the crest of a popular mass movement numbering hundreds-of-thousands. Last year he reaffirmed his victory even more spectacularly after an abortive challenge by a residual *clique* of unreconstructed Blairites. Rupert Murdoch and his fellow media moguls had been mercilessly hounding Corbyn with unremitting smears and sneers, and blacked out all news outlets for his program.

Terrorism

Another factor, which was exploited to the utmost by the gutter press, was

the two murderous terrorist atrocities committed in the run-up to the elections. As previously in France, Spain and elsewhere, fascists (in this case of the Islamic brand) were committing atrocities in an effort to destabilize the elections and provoke a stampede to the right. Knowing that a Labor victory under Corbyn could offer young people real educational opportunities and worthwhile jobs, they were hell-bent on preventing it, because that would at last give young Muslims hope, and thus eat into their potential support base. The media hyped up Corbyn’s alleged former “friendship” with IRA and Hamas members to depict him as a bloodthirsty terrorist sympathizer (while simultaneously denouncing him for his opposition to the Trident nuclear program and his admitted refusal to press the nuclear button.) The *Daily Mail* published 13 pages of this dirty propaganda.

Yet in the event, all the Tory rags’ dirty propaganda put together had zero effect in blunting Labor’s appeal, especially to the youth.

Labor’s program

Once the election was called, however, while maintaining as before an unremitting barrage of distortion and vitriolic abuse against Corbyn, the media were nevertheless obliged to give some air space to Labor’s program. Labor’s most radical manifesto since 1945 included an end to austerity, defense of the National Health Service, abolition of student tuition

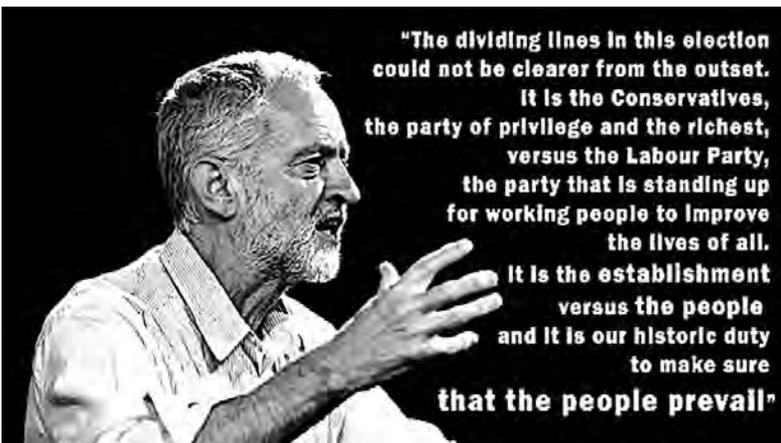
fees, a public housing program, restoration of school funding cuts, nationalization of major public utilities, long-overdue rises in public sec-

tor pay, and many other fundamental reforms, all to be funded by a rise in corporation tax and higher income taxes on the rich. This program gained enormous popularity. Corbyn addressed enthusiastic mass rallies up and down the country. Young people, habitually hard to register and motivate for elections, mobilized in massive numbers. Seventy percent of voters aged 18-24 supported Labor. It was Labor’s success in inspiring the youth and other normally apathetic strata of the electorate, which swung the election for Labor.

Election results

In the event, while in a sharply polarized election in which the minor parties were all squeezed, the Tories’ vote rose by 5.5 percent, they lost several seats and May ended up humiliated, bereft of an overall majority. In contrast, Labor’s vote shot up by 9.5 percent to over 40 percent, the highest increase in its share of the votes since 1945, and the best Labor result since Blair’s landslide in 1997 (in which, unlike Corbyn, Blair had enjoyed the benefit of fulsome support from Murdoch and Big Business.) In 2005, Blair had won 35.2 percent of the vote with 9,552,436 votes. In 2010, Brown had won just 29 percent (8,606,527 votes.) In 2015, Ed Miliband had won 30.4 percent (9,347,304.) By contrast, under Jeremy Corbyn with his radical manifesto, Labor in 2017 won 40 percent of the electorate with a massive 12,858,652 votes.

Now May finds herself in a hopeless trap. She had confined her propaganda slogans to a bunch of alliterative mantras, shrilly repeating the need for “strong stable government” and warning of the dangers of a “coalition of chaos.” These have spectacularly backfired on her. No government could be weaker or more unstable than May’s new “coalition of chaos” with the ultra-right DUP (Democratic Unionist Party,) a sexist homophobic creationist



party responsible for inflaming murderous hatred over 25 years of sectarian bigotry in Northern Ireland. No one expects this desperate gambit to last. All it will take is one parliamentary defection or one lost by-election to bring the government crashing to defeat.

Corbyn's enemies in the Parliamentary Labor Party are temporarily immobilized. Along with the BBC and media barons, many Blairite MPs had openly dissociated themselves from Corbyn and denounced him as "unelectable," even while campaigning for re-election as Labor MPs. Now many of them are falling over each other to eat their words, eager to grovel and ingratiate themselves with Britain's next prime minister. Yet the long-overdue split with the relics of New Labor is imminent, either in the form of a new and futile challenge against Corbyn, or a clean breakaway by the Blairites to form an anti-Brexit coalition together with the Lib-Dems and the Cameron/Osborne wing of the Tory Party. There is after all a vacuum, all the more so now: a space for a party representing the true interests of the ruling class.

"We all fucking hate her"

The plight of the Tory Party today is best summed up by the anonymous comment of one Tory MP quoted in the *Daily Mail*: "We all fucking hate her. But there is nothing we can do. She has totally fucked us." That could be the epitaph of the British ruling class after this election.

Roger Silverman is a member of the Workers' International Network and of Momentum, the mass movement that sprang up to support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership within the Labor Party, UK.

—Oakland Socialist, June 10, 2017

<https://oaklandsocialist.com/2017/06/10/british-elections-corbyn-upturges-may-in-hopeless-trap/>

Deadly U.S. Airstrikes in Syria

UN investigator: U.S. Coalition airstrikes causing "staggering loss of life" in Syria

BY ANDREA GERMANOS

June 14, 2017—Intensified airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition targeting the Islamic State are responsible for a "staggering loss of civilian life" in Raqqa, Syria, a United Nations investigator said Wednesday.

The northern Syrian city, the so-called capital of the Islamic State (ISIS), is where U.S.-backed forces, including Syrian Kurdish and Arab U.S.-backed rebel groups, last week began an offensive. That effort to retake the city from ISIS, also referred to as ISIL, was aided by U.S.-led coalition airstrikes.

But these increased strikes were in the crosshairs of Paulo Pinheiro, the chairman of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for Syria, who gave the U.N. Human Rights Council his dire assessment of the situation for Syrian civilians, who "are in the unenviable role of being the target of most warring parties" and face "disastrous consequences."

While Pinheiro told the U.N. body that a successful offensive "could liberate the city's civilian population from the group's oppressive clutches, including Yazidi women and girls, whom the group has kept sexually enslaved for almost three years as part of an ongoing and unaddressed genocide," he underscored that the "imperative to fight terrorism must not [...] be undertaken at the expense of civilians who unwillingly find themselves living in areas where ISIL is present."

He said "that the intensification of airstrikes" as a result of the offensive

"has resulted not only in staggering loss of civilian life, but has also led to 160,000 civilians fleeing their homes and becoming internally displaced."

Those fleeing Raqqa, and countless others forced to join the ranks of internally displaced people across Syria, face "a wretched experience" and "are particularly vulnerable to violence," Pinheiro said. He also pointed to "aerial bombardments by pro-Government forces" and other forced evacuations that leave civilians in peril.

According to *Reuters*,

"...the U.S. delegation [to the Human Rights Council] made no reference to Raqqa or the air strikes. U.S. diplomat Jason Mack called the Syrian government 'the primary perpetrator' of egregious human rights violations in

the country."

U.S.-led coalition airstrikes killing Syrian civilians is not new.

Chris Woods, director of monitoring group Airwars, said recently to *The Intercept*:

"We have been killing a lot of civilians in and around Raqqa for quite some time now, yet these incidents are rarely admitted by the coalition and there is almost no interest from international media."

Echoing Pinheiro, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said this month, "Just because ISIS holds an area does not mean less care can be taken." He added: "Civilians should always be protected,

Human Rights Watch also denounced in a statement Wednesday the reported use of white phosphorus munitions by the coalition in Raqqa as well as Mosul, Iraq.

whether they are in areas controlled by ISIS or by any other party.”

The new comments from Pinheiro follow what the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said was the deadliest month for Syrian civilians since the U.S.-led bombing campaign began in September of 2014.

Human Rights Watch also denounced in a statement Wednesday the reported use of white phosphorus munitions by the coalition in Raqqa as well as Mosul, Iraq.

“No matter how white phosphorus is used, it poses a high risk of horrific and long-lasting harm in crowded cities like Raqqa and Mosul and any other areas with concentrations of civilians,” said Steve Goose, arms director at the human rights organization. “U.S.-led forces should take all feasible precautions to minimize civilian harm when using white phosphorus in Iraq and Syria,” he said.

Pinheiro said in his address: “the only way to end civilian suffering is to end this war.”

—*Common Dreams*, June 14, 2017

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/06/14/un-investigator-us-coalition-airstrikes-causing-staggering-loss-life-syria>



Defending the Bolivarian Revolution

Script for plans to destroy the Revolution was written in Washington

BY SERGIO ALEJANDRO GÓMEZ

May 25, 2017—Breaking the law, creating a parallel government, organizing alternative economic institutions, harassing public officials, destroying property, hoarding of goods, marching, obstructing social events, boycotting elections, disrupting schools, using false identities, seeking arrests, launching hunger strikes, and overwhelming the state administrative systems—are only a few of the 198 methods to overthrow governments proposed by CIA *coup* expert Gene Sharp, more than 40 years ago.

Finding just one of these techniques that has not been used against Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution is difficult.

These last several years, President Nicolás Maduro’s administration has faced particularly intense attacks and the implementation of so-called Non-Conventional War, based on psychological manipulation, social protest, *coups*, and irregular armed struggle.

Unlike traditional conflicts, non-conventional wars are based on promoting confrontations between authorities and the population, to undermine the government’s ability to function, leading to its demise without the use of a foreign military intervention.

Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of warfare is the operation carried out by U.S. and Western powers against the government of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. Bands of opponents, armed and advised from abroad, carried out the dirty work on the ground, while NATO provided air support, and the transnational corporate media manipulated the facts presented to the public.

Venezuela, a case study

As soon as the possibility of an independent leader like Hugo Chávez winning the Presidency came onto the horizon—in the country with the world’s

greatest proven oil reserves—a strategy to overthrow him was activated.

Given the fact that the corrupt 4th Republic was entirely discredited; the first steps were taken to organize a new opposition and recruit younger leaders. It was the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that channeled funds to create political parties and train many of the leaders of the current Democratic Unity Coalition (MUD).

U.S. Special Forces manuals, like Training Circular 18-01, define seven different stages of non-conventional war. The first few are devoted to “psychological preparation,” to unify the population in opposition to the government, and “initial contact” by special services agents on the ground. Subsequent stages include the extension of anti-government actions, moving toward a “transition,” during which the national government’s control of the country is challenged.

Despite the defeat of the 2002 *coup* attempt—by a massive mobilization of the Venezuelan people—the idea of taking the streets was never abandoned. Chávez was confronted by protests and sabotage, of different proportions, until his very last days.

When the Bolivarian leader died in March of 2013, and his successor Nicolás Maduro took the reins, the right wing and their foreign advisers activated the most aggressive tactics of their non-conventional war strategy, in hopes of dealing the revolution a final blow.

More than street barricades

The mounting violence of protests taking place recently in Venezuela is reminiscent of the street barricades and fighting (*guarimbas*), which occurred in February of 2014, leaving 43 dead and more than 800 injured.

At that time, extremists, who emerged in protests allegedly composed of students, went so far as to string cables across streets to decapitate motor cycle riders, and caused millions of dollars in damage to public property, with the objective of sowing panic and paralyzing the country.

But this last wave of violence appears to be better-organized and more extensive. Some of the scenes reported are totally senseless, defying all logic.

The attack by armed opposition gangs on the Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías Maternal-Infant Hospital, with 54 children inside, would qualify as a war crime before any international court.

It is not difficult to identify the organized groups in marches—holding shields, wearing gas masks, and waving blunt objects. If the protests are supposed to be peaceful, why do these youth come prepared for a fight?

A video recently released by Venezuelan authorities shows a dozen youth wearing hoods and making Molotov cocktails, during a march in the comfortable East Caracas neighborhood of Altamira.

After the arrest of Nixon Leal, a violent subject linked to several MUD leaders, Vice President Tareck El Aissami presented evidence about how the armed bands are organized to carry out open confrontations with the government in Caracas and other important cities, clearly following the steps outlined in non-conventional war strategy.

Threats to authorities are not only physical, but are also meant to humiliate, as seen in the recent practice of using human excrement to fabricate homemade bombs called “*Puputovs*.”

The symbolic war and fake news

One aspect of non-conventional war, which is key to its success, is the symbolic dimension, especially in the construction of realities via the mass media, even more so in hyper-connected societies where many use social networks to

find out what is happening just a few meters away from their own homes.

Sometimes with greater intensity than in the streets, Venezuelan cyberspace functions as a battlefield, in which it is difficult to differentiate accurate information and what authorities have identified as fake news, or “false positives.”

Given the fact that the corrupt 4th Republic was entirely discredited; the first steps were taken to organize a new opposition and recruit younger leaders. It was the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that channeled funds to create political parties and train many of the leaders of the current Democratic Unity Coalition (MUD).

Making its way across the planet this month was an image of two Venezuelan youth, naked and tied to a tree in the state of Táchira, showing signs of a physical attack. Several international media, including Latin American ones, reported the act as the responsibility of Chavista “bands.” It was in fact linked to common criminal activity and residents of the area had decided to serve justice themselves.

The selectivity of the international corporate press, in terms of choosing what to report, is also used as a weapon. The same day (April 19, 2017) that three million people marched in Caracas to show support for Nicolás Maduro, what dominated headlines on mainstream

websites and newspapers were the much less attended opposition protests.

Also among non-conventional war tactics, is the creation of symbols with which any group could identify. The image of a woman dressed in a Venezuelan flag, standing in front of a Bolivarian National Guard armored vehicle, was publicized relentlessly, and went on to become the demonstrators’ icon.

Likewise, the number of photographers surrounding a young violin player, during an opposition protest, makes it hard to believe that this was a spontaneous act, and not a carefully staged one.

The solution

The Venezuelan right, traditionally divided given its personal rifts, with various individuals competing for power, is, on the contrary, united in following the non-conventional script written in Washington. Violence is the only common ground.

Repeated calls for street demonstrations, despite the fact that more than 40 lives have already been lost in this round of *guarimbas*, along with the opposition’s refusal to participate in the Constituent Assembly, make clear, once again, that the only solution the opposition offers is an end to the revolution, by any means and regardless of consequences.

The continuity of the social project begun by Hugo Chávez—which has forever changed the reality of this country to benefit the poor—is not all that is at stake.

The success of the opposition strategy would become a nefarious reference point for the use of non-conventional warfare, one that would be added to the list of *coups*, military interventions, and secret operations, which bear the trademark signs of Washington at work in Latin America.

—Granma, May 25, 2017

<http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2017-05-25/the-script-for-plans-to-destroy-the-bolivarian-revolution-was-written-in-washington>

Hands Off Venezuela

STATEMENT ON VENEZUELA BY THE UNITED NATIONAL ANTIWAR COALITION (UNAC) AND THE BLACK ALLIANCE FOR PEACE

The United States has been conducting a brutal, 20-year-long campaign of destabilization against Venezuela in an attempt to cause “regime change” in that country. This has taken the form of economic sabotage and financial manipulation as well as support for the mobilization of right-wing forces in increasingly violent demonstrations.

This is not a recent policy but one that has also been carried out under the Obama and Bush administrations as well as the present Trump administration. In 2002, right-wing forces inside Venezuela attempted a *coup* against then-President Hugo Chávez. Many sources have confirmed that the U.S. gave the go-ahead to the opposition to orchestrate the *coup* and promised support. Soon after the *coup*, the people of Venezuela turned out in the streets in massive numbers and restored Chávez to the presidency.

Barack Obama continued the assault on the Venezuelan revolution by imposing crippling sanctions and asserting that Venezuela was a “security threat” to the United States. These attacks from the U.S. exemplify attempts to realize full-spectrum dominance, the epitome of imperialist intervention, which has brought so much suffering to the world.



May Day March for Venezuela's government

Some of the very same opposition leaders who were involved in the 2002 *coup* attempt are today behind the present unrest, which has seen well-financed opposition forces leading violent protests against the government of Nicolas Maduro. The U.S. corporate media has reported on these actions but has blamed the violence on the Venezuelan government and has not reported the huge mobilizations in defense of the Maduro government.

The economic crisis in Venezuela is severe. The Venezuelan economy is dependent on its large oil resources. The oil has been nationalized since 1976, but there has been a continual push from U.S. interests as well as wealthy Venezuelans to privatize it. Though the oil remains nationalized, the refining, transportation, and markets are all private and have been used to undercut the ability of the oil industry to support the economy. Additionally, in the past few years, with the encouragement of Wall Street, oil production around the world has been kept high, driving down the price, which hurts oil-dependent economies, including those of countries that the U.S. opposes, such as Russia and Iran, in addition to Venezuela.

The U.S. media also has been full of stories of Venezuelan supermarkets with near-empty shelves and long lines of people seeking basic necessities. What hasn't been reported is that the privately owned food corporations are deliberately hoarding supplies intended for working-class neighborhoods while making sure that food and other goods are readily available in the wealthier areas.

The Bolivarian Revolution has always endeavored to be an ally of the people of United States and to extend a hand of friendship and solidarity. When the U.S. government turned its

back on the people of the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Venezuelan government offered humanitarian aid but was rebuffed. Venezuela provided fuel assistance to low-income Black and Brown people when the U.S. government would not.

These acts reinforced the strong support that many in the Black community had for the process in Venezuela and deepened the commitment of Black activists to stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela and their process. This support is in line with the long-standing Black radical tradition of defending nations under imperialist attack by the U.S. government.

The defeat of the Bolivarian Revolution at the hands of U.S. imperialism and its reactionary right-wing allies in Venezuela would be a defeat for progressive forces all over the world and a disaster for the people of Venezuela and its people, as it has been in Libya and Ukraine and Haiti and every nation that has lost its sovereignty to the two-party commitment to imperialist intervention.

UNAC and the Black Alliance for Peace demand:

- End US interference in the affairs of Venezuela!
- Self-determination for the Venezuelan people!
- End the sanctions and economic warfare now!

A bipartisan bill has been submitted in the Senate (S.1018) with the intention of further destabilizing Venezuela. For more information on this bill and some actions you can take to oppose it, please go to:

<http://afgj.org/take-action-today-to-support-venezuelas-democracy>

—United National Antiwar Coalition,
May 2017

<http://nepajac.org/venstatement.htm>

Class Struggle in Greece

BY ARTURO RODRÍGUEZ

May 26, 2017—Wednesday, May 24, 2017, Greece was shaken by a general strike. On Thursday, there were protests in all major cities against a new round of austerity measures. Unlike previous general strikes, which are regularly called as a formality and fail to mobilize significant sectors of the working class, this time important services were affected and various ports, hospitals, and airports were paralyzed.

Police estimates said that, in Athens, 12,000 people came out on to the streets and, in Thessaloniki, there were 6,000. This was the largest numbers seen recently. On this occasion, the government's attacks are particularly vicious and scandalous, and amount to a new, fourth memorandum.

The drama continues

Last Thursday, new austerity measures were narrowly approved in parliament by the Syriza-ANEL coalition. This legislation brings about a lowering of the tax-free income threshold and the elimination of various tax benefits, which will see workers who eke out a living on a few hundred euros a month paying income tax. Unemployment benefits will be cut for the youth. It also introduces sharp cuts to the already miserable pensions—59 percent of pensioners earn less than 1,000€ (\$1117.00 monthly), which will be cut by nine percent on average and in some cases by up to 18 percent. Those who owe money to the tax authorities are liable of being evicted and having their houses auctioned. It also facilitates lockouts by the employers and collective redundancies (layoffs). These attacks add yet more pressure to the battered and abused working people of Greece. According to a recent EU study, 35 percent of the Greek population faces poverty and social exclusion, while 22.2 percent faces severe material

deprivations. The government has committed to cut spending by \$5.4 billion by 2020. Additional public enterprises will be privatized, including parts of the electricity and the state oil company. These measures were passed by the Syriza government to unlock a new, \$8.3 billion tranche of bailout funds—used overwhelmingly to repay old debts. Outrageously, this legislation has been passed as a prerequisite to discuss this new bailout, which is still being negotiated by the Greek government, the European Commission, and the International Monetary Fund.

The rottenness of the European Union, a rapacious, imperialist outfit used to manage the common interests of the European bourgeoisie, continues to stand out over the Greek question.

The creditors demand a primary budget surplus equivalent to 3.5 per-

cent of the GDP until 2022. The European Commission contends that on this basis a long-term solution to the Greek debt crisis will be found, insofar, they add, as the Greek economy grows at around two percent until... 2060! This is absolute folly. The Greek economy continues to be extremely weak. Last week it entered recession again. A 23 percent unemployment rate oppresses it like a tombstone. The extraordinary fragility of Greek capitalism is plain to all. This so-called long-term plan is nothing but a fig leaf to cover the crass self-interest of European, and namely German, capitalism, which has no lasting solution to the crisis of Greek capitalism other than to bleed the Greek people dry and pave the way for Grexit. With elections around the corner, and the spread of protectionist sentiments among sectors of the German ruling class, Berlin is unprepared to make even the slightest concession to Greece. Schäuble has clearly stated that no reductions to the Greek debt will be accepted. Not even symbolic concessions are now given to Athens in return for the sharp terms of the memorandum. The aim of the Commission is to



force Greece out of the Eurozone as part of the re-structuring and downsizing of the EU. Only then will the debt be renegotiated. The rottenness of the European Union, a rapacious, imperialist outfit used to manage the common interests of the European bourgeoisie, continues to stand out over the Greek question. All those who harbor illusions about the supposedly progressive character of the EU should take a look at its robber baron politics in Greece. It is not surprising that, according to a recent poll by MRB (market research company in Greece), 54.8 percent of Greeks call for a rejection of the new memorandum “even if this entails a break with the bondholders and the expulsion from the Eurozone.”

The IMF (International Monetary Fund) has shown what appears to be a more lenient face towards Greece, calling for haircuts to the debt. At the same time, however, they are attempting to drop out of the bailout programs, and have so far disbursed no money in the third memorandum signed in 2015. This only reflects the selfish interests of U.S. imperialism, which pulls the strings in the IMF, and which wants Berlin to shoulder the Greek debt.

Confronted with the callousness of the EU, Syriza has tried to lean on other imperialist powers, especially Russia and China. Only a few days ago Tsipras met Xi Jinping and far-reaching economic agreements were announced. Indeed, Greece is to play an important role in the Chinese “silk road,” providing an outlet for Beijing to the Mediterranean. Chinese state company COSCO has bought a majority stake in the port of Piraeus, and one of the most important bidders in the privatization of the Greek electricity company is the China State Grid. But it is risky business for a small, downtrodden country to try to balance itself on powerful imperialist nations, and rather than exploit their antagonisms in the interests of Greece, these powers are exploiting Greece’s

weakness and vulnerability in their own voracious interests.

Syriza’s degeneration

Shamefully, Syriza continues to serve as the pliable instrument of the European and Greek capitalists and to provide the Commission with its customary pound of flesh. Its promise of a way out of the crisis and the memorandum and of debt relief is crumbling under the new austerity measures, the unwillingness of the EU to ease the country’s debt, and the incapacity of Greece to enter the bond market and to

This so-called long-term plan is nothing but a fig leaf to cover the crass self-interest of European, and namely German, capitalism, which has no lasting solution to the crisis of Greek capitalism other than to bleed the Greek people dry and pave the way for Grexit.

service its debt independently. To make matters worse, Tsipras’ erstwhile defense of “the constitution” and “democracy” has come to naught, as he now signs a new memorandum without a popular mandate, passing legislation that will have to be continued on the next parliamentary term, and which contain measures that are likely to be deemed unconstitutional, trampling on basic bourgeois democracy. Syriza has become the administrator of crisis-ridden Greek capitalism and is being used to grind down the Greek working class and the impoverished middle classes.

The absolute degeneration of Tsipras and his *clique*, however, flows not from their moral bankruptcy, but

above all from their political bankruptcy, and their attempt, however honest in the beginning, to resolve the problems of the Greek working class within the bounds of capitalism and imperialism. This reformist strategy contained the germs of betrayal and defeat from the outset, and should serve as a ghastly example to other movements of the radical left about the dangers of trying to negotiate with the capitalists and to appeal to their goodwill. Progressive reforms can only be wrested from the bourgeoisie through revolutionary methods, through mass mobilization, organization from below, by breaking with the capitalists and their institutions and leaning on the solidarity of the international working class, and through the expropriation of the big banks and monopolies.

Tsipras’ popularity has now collapsed; he has become one of the most hated politicians in the country. According to recent polls, right-wing New Democracy has a fifteen-point lead over Syriza. The government’s betrayal, although couched in a language of survival and of “building hegemony in the long term,” only paved the way for the demoralization of the working class and for the gradual collapse of Syriza, which is faithfully following the path of the PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement—a social democratic political party in Greece.) Opinion polls reveal a widespread sentiment of bitterness, cynicism, and disillusionment. A recent study by *Kapa Research* revealed that 72 percent of Greeks feel disappointed, 64 percent are angry, 41 percent feel afraid, and 71 percent uncertain about the future. In this context, we could see further cracks in the government, which over the months has lost MPs and has seen its parliamentary majority narrow. It would not come as a surprise if Tsipras called for new elections as an act of desperation.

Syriza has burnt its bridges with the masses. This last memorandum is not

only a blow to its fading reserves of social support, but it is also a provocation and a revulsive against the tremendous apathy and passivity that had ensured a certain degree of social peace in the last two years.

The class struggle and the KKE (Communist Party of Greece)

The general strike last Wednesday was followed by marches and demonstrations by pensioners on Thursday. These protests take place in a context of relative upswing in the class struggle after years of stagnation. In recent months there have been marches by school students, pensioners, farmers, the anti-fascist movement, and localized neighborhood struggles. Last Monday, there was an important rally against the construction of a new football field in Nea Philadelphia. On Thursday the 25th, there was a strike of delivery workers, organized independently of the trade union federations on a militant, grassroots basis, and which included a mass motorcycle parade. Although there is still a long way to go, and the burden of the economic crisis and of emigration weigh down on the workers and the youth, the class struggle follows its course and the pressure of events will gradually dissipate the demoralization that set in after Syriza's capitulation.

The idea is setting, especially (but not exclusively) among the most advanced elements of the youth and the working class, that the current, desperate situation of endless attacks, provocations, and crises cannot be stopped without the active intervention of the masses in political life. It is significant that an EU-sponsored study revealed that 67 percent of the Greek youth would join a violent insurrection against the government—the highest such figure in Europe.

Although the strike on Wednesday had a greater following than on previous occasions, it was still far from the type of action that is needed to revert the politi-

cal situation of stagnation and defeat. Indeed, the leaderships of the trade unions continue their harmful policies of defeatist, ritualistic general strikes with no adequate preparation and, most importantly, with no clear perspectives for victory. The trade union bureaucracy has become a formidable brake to the movement, and a genuine, democratic congress of the ADEDY (equivalent to GSEE in the public sector)-GSEE (General Confederation of Greek Workers in the private sector.) GSEE federations for the selection of a new leadership is a necessary demand. In the current context, a general strike against austerity would only succeed with patient preparation, through assemblies in the workplaces and the neighborhoods, with the collaboration of the different organizations of the radical left and the labor movement, with clear demands, and combining strike action with a broader political, united front against the memorandum. Indeed, such a movement would need to put forward a perspective for political change, for a clear way out.

In this context, the Greek Communist Party, the KKE, has to play an important role. It is the only genuine force of opposition in parliament and the only mass party of the anti-capitalist left, with a powerful trade union front. Although it has a long history of heroic struggles, for decades it has been blighted by the pernicious influence of Stalinism: of class collaboration, nationalism, social conservatism, and bureaucratism, and, especially in recent years, by a sectarian attitude to the class struggle.

However, the pressure of events is being felt even inside the notoriously hermetic and monolithic KKE, which has experienced significant changes. It has abandoned the Stalinist two-stage theory, criticized the Popular Front strategy followed during the Second World War and its aftermath, and, despite some limitations, has adopted a proletarian, anti-capitalist, and, significantly, internationalist position to the

question of the Greek crisis. This turn to the left has been consolidated in the recent party congress in March, which contained numerous positive elements, and, although there are still many shortcomings, the party is moving in the correct direction. This evolution in the party's rhetoric, worldview, and program has not fallen from the sky, but flows from the living class struggle, which is making its pressure felt inside the KKE and is forcing it to draw conclusions and move away from previous flawed positions and from its sectarianism.

During the debate on the new austerity package in parliament on Thursday, communist MP Dimitris Koutsoumpas delivered a speech that any genuine revolutionary Marxist could have endorsed, attacking the attempts to lean on the EU but also on the "shrewd" imperialists of China and Russia, and pointing that the only genuine solution for the working class, in Greece and abroad, is the expropriation of the capitalist corporations and the socialist transformation of society, the only strategy that can offer a way out to the horror without end that is capitalism. He ended by calling for mass mobilizations, and making an appeal for unity in the struggle, and to discuss and debate the positions of the KKE in the movement. This is key. It is not enough to have a broadly correct position, to be armed with a revolutionary program, but to be able to connect it with the living struggle of the masses and to win them over through correct tactics.

Despite the prescience of the KKE, which predicted Syriza's capitulation and criticized it from the left, the party has been unable to make any significant electoral gains, and hovers at around eight percent in opinion polls. There is tremendous potential for a force like the KKE to grow in the current context. Half of the electorate, according to recent polls, mistrust both Tsipras and conservative leader Mitsotakis. The reason for the incapacity of the KKE to tap into this potential

has been the sectarian, self-sufficient attitude of the party and its reluctance to fight alongside other forces, to relate to the existing level of consciousness and to the concrete tasks of the struggle. Moreover, despite their bold verbal attacks against the new memorandum in parliament, they failed in practice to prepare a real mass movement against it, endorsing the defeatist and poorly organized general strike.

Only by collaborating in a comradely manner with other left-wing parties and organizations, with the unions, the social movements and more broadly with the fighting youth and working class, by discussing with them in an open and friendly manner, can the KKE win over the sympathy of the Greek masses and lead the working class to the conquest of power and the socialist transformation of society. There is a desperate need for unity in the movement, to regroup and to go on the offensive. The radical left party Antarsya has made an appeal to the Communist Party for a political and trade union united front. This is a step in the right direction, but coming from a small organization like Antarsya, it is insufficient. If the KKE made an honest call for a united front with all the forces of the left and the labor movement against the memorandum, with a clear program and an ambitious roadmap combining mass mobilizations, strike action, and parliamentary pressure, discussed and organized from below in open assemblies, the way would be paved for the defeat of the memorandum, for a new turn to the left in society, and, eventually, for a genuinely anti-capitalist, revolutionary government.

—*In Defense of Marxism*, May 26, 2017

<https://www.marxist.com/the-fourth-memorandum-and-the-class-struggle-in-greece.htm>

U.S. Bloodbath in Yemen Continues

Trump's latest disastrous raid kills more civilians in Yemen while U.S. media obediently echoes the Pentagon

BY BEN NORTON

The latest U.S. military raid in Yemen was yet another disaster, resulting in the deaths of at least five civilians and the wounding of six more, according to a human rights group and sources in Yemen interviewed by *Reuters*. The botched attack follows the Trump administration's first raid in Yemen in January, a bloody massacre that left up to 25 civilians dead.

In the wake of the new attack, major corporate media outlets have failed to shine light on the reported civilian casualties, instead echoing the unsubstantiated claims of the Pentagon.

In the early morning of May 23, the U.S. Navy's SEAL Team 6 quietly launched a raid in the Marib Governorate in central Yemen. The troops were targeting an alleged al-Qaeda compound, and the military says some were wounded in the attack.

Immediately after the raid, major newspapers like the *Washington Post* ran a newswire from the *Associated Press* titled "U.S. raid kills seven al-Qaeda militants in Yemen." The brief story uncritically repeated the claims of the U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Central Command, which characterized the raid as a success in the fight against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and said all of those killed had been members of the extremist group.

The AP did not even entertain the possibility of civilian casualties. Most mainstream media outlets were similarly compliant and un-skeptical in their reporting.

Meanwhile, the international human rights organization, *Reprise*, was doing reporting of its own, and released a statement May 23 that painted a different story of the incident.

Reprise spoke with witnesses from al-Jubah, the Yemeni village where the attack took place. The sources personally identified and named five victims of the U.S. raid, who they noted were not members of al-Qaeda. Among the five civilians killed was Nasser al-Adhal, a partially blind 70-year-old. Witnesses told *Reprise* that al-Adhal tried to greet the Navy SEALs, and was instead shot.

After al-Adhal was gunned down, according to the witnesses, several other Yemeni villagers became angry and began to argue with the U.S. troops, who subsequently shot and killed four more.

Another four villagers were injured in the U.S. raid, one of them a 69-year-old man.

When al-Qaeda militants heard the Navy SEALs gunshots, the witnesses told *Reprise*, they joined in the attack. In the subsequent firefight, two al-Qaeda fighters were killed. Several Navy SEALs were also wounded, and fled via helicopter.

The version of the story reflected in *Reprise's* report contrasts starkly with that of the U.S. military, which denies that five of the seven Yemenis killed were civilians.

In the rights group's statement, Kate Higham, who leads the assassinations program at *Reprise*, commented, "This new flawed raid by President Trump shows the U.S. is not capable of distinguishing a terrorist from an innocent civilian."

"When even a 70-year-old is shot dead, it is clear these attacks are not targeted or precise," Higham added. She called on the U.S. to investigate the incident and to "halt all raids and

drone strikes before more innocent Yemenis are killed.”

Further confirmation of civilian casualties

Reprieve was not the only organization that reported civilian casualties in the U.S. raid. International news agency *Reuters* acknowledged that civilians were likely killed in the attack. Eight paragraphs into an article with the otherwise uncritical headline “Seven al Qaeda militants killed in Special Forces raid in Yemen: U.S. military,” *Reuters* noted that two sources in Yemen’s Marib governorate had reported civilian casualties.

Five members of Yemen’s al-Moradi clan were killed and six more were wounded, all of them civilians, according to *Reuters*’ sources on the ground.

An obedient, uncritical media

Few media outlets gave credence to *Reprieve*’s report or *Reuters*’ findings. *CNN* did not acknowledge either, but merely echoed Pentagon spokesperson Jeff Davis, who claimed there were “no credible indications of civilian casualties.”

In a follow-up article, the *Washington Post* did the same. *NBC News*, *ABC News*, *Voice of America* and others were just as obedient, ignoring reports of civilian deaths.

Fox News triumphantly declared, “Yemen raid against Al Qaeda was ‘deepest’ U.S. special ops have gone.” It similarly failed to mention *Reprieve*’s findings, and uncritically echoed Davis’ claims.

The *New York Times* was one of the only major news outlets to acknowledge *Reprieve*’s report. In an article titled “Navy SEALs Kill Seven Militants in Yemen Raid but Suffer Injuries,” the *Times* mentioned the rights organization’s findings in a lone paragraph—but then immediately wrote them off, citing Pentagon spokesperson Jeff Davis, who said, “We don’t have reason to believe that’s the case.”

Many media outlets, including *CBS News*, *The Hill*, *Military Times* and others, expressed much more interest in the U.S. troops who were wounded in the attack than in the civilian casualties. Ironically, many of these media outlets simultaneously acknowledged the civilian casualties in the January raid in Yemen, yet treated the new attack as if it was a success.

Previous botched raid

Trump’s first clandestine operation was also in Yemen and was even more of a disaster.

On January 29, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) forces launched a raid in southern Yemen. Reflecting on the attack, a senior military official admitted, “Almost everything went wrong.”

Up to two-dozen civilians were massacred in the attack. Among those killed was an 8-year-old girl named Nawar al-Awlaki. Nawar (or Nora) was the third member of the al-Awlaki

family to be killed by the U.S. In 2011, Nawar’s father, Anwar al-Awlaki, was killed in a drone strike in Yemen. Anwar was an influential Salafi jihadist propagandist with extensive links to al-Qaeda. He was also a U.S. citizen.

Anwar’s teenage son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, was killed in a U.S. drone strike just two weeks later.

In the wake of Trump’s first raid in January, Nasser al-Awlaki, an extended member of the family who served as Yemen’s former minister of agriculture, spoke with sources in Yemen. Witnesses recalled that Navy SEALs had killed everyone in a house, including women and children, then set the building on fire.

Ben Norton is a reporter for AlterNet’s Grayzone Project.

—AlterNet, May 25, 2017

<http://www.alternet.org/grayzone-project/yemen-us-military-raid-civilians-killed-media>



U.S. and the Rise of ISIS

Now the truth emerges: how the U.S. fuelled the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq

BY SEUMAS MILNE

June 3, 2017—The war on terror, that campaign without end launched 14 years ago by George Bush, is tying itself up in ever more grotesque contortions. On Monday the trial in London of a Swedish man, Bherin Gildo, accused of terrorism in Syria, collapsed after it became clear British intelligence had been arming the same rebel groups the defendant was charged with supporting.

The prosecution abandoned the case, apparently to avoid embarrassing the intelligence services. The defense argued that going ahead with the trial would have been an “affront to justice” when there was plenty of evidence the British state was itself providing “extensive support” to the armed Syrian opposition.

That didn’t only include the “non-lethal assistance” boasted of by the government (including body armor and military vehicles), but training, logistical support and the secret supply of “arms on a massive scale.” Reports were cited that MI6 had cooperated with the CIA on a “rat line” of arms

transfers from Libyan stockpiles to the Syrian rebels in 2012 after the fall of the Gaddafi regime.

Clearly, the absurdity of sending someone to prison for doing what ministers and their security officials were up to themselves became too much. But it’s only the latest of a string

However confused U.S. policy may often be, a weak, partitioned Iraq and Syria fit such an approach perfectly.

of such cases. Less fortunate was a London cab driver, Anis Sardar, who was given a life sentence a fortnight earlier for taking part in 2007 in resistance to the occupation of Iraq by U.S. and British forces. Armed opposition to illegal invasion and occupation clearly doesn’t constitute terrorism or murder on most definitions, including the Geneva Convention.

But terrorism is now squarely in the eye of the beholder. And nowhere is that more so than in the Middle East, where today’s terrorists are tomorrow’s fighters against tyranny—and allies are enemies—often at the bewildering whim of a western policymaker’s conference call.

For the past year, U.S., British and other western forces have been back in Iraq; supposedly in the cause of destroying the hyper-sectarian terror group Islamic State (formerly known as al-Qaida in Iraq). This was after ISIS overran huge chunks of Iraqi and Syrian territory and proclaimed a self-styled Islamic caliphate.

The campaign isn’t going well. Last month, ISIS rolled into the Iraqi city of Ramadi, while on the other side of the now nonexistent border its forces conquered the Syrian town of Palmyra. Al-Qaida’s official franchise, the Nusra Front, has also been making gains in Syria.

Some Iraqis complain that the U.S. sat on its hands while all this was going on. The Americans insist they are trying to avoid civilian casualties, and claim significant successes. Privately, officials say they don’t want to be seen hammering Sunni strongholds in a sectarian war and risk upsetting their Sunni allies in the Gulf.

A revealing light on how we got here has now been shone by a recently declassified secret U.S. intelligence report, written in August 2012, which uncannily predicts—and effectively welcomes—the prospect of a “Salafist principality” in eastern Syria and an al-Qaida-controlled Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. In stark contrast to western claims at the time, the Defense Intelligence Agency document identifies al-Qaida in Iraq (which became



ISIS) and fellow Salafists as the “major forces driving the insurgency in Syria”—and states that “western countries, the Gulf states and Turkey” were supporting the opposition’s efforts to take control of eastern Syria.

Raising the “possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality,” the Pentagon report goes on, “this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).”

Which is pretty well exactly what happened two years later. The report isn’t a policy document. It’s heavily redacted and there are ambiguities in the language. But the implications are clear enough. A year into the Syrian rebellion, the U.S. and its allies weren’t only supporting and arming an opposition they knew to be dominated by extreme sectarian groups; they were prepared to countenance the creation of some sort of “Islamic state”—despite the “grave danger” to Iraq’s unity—as a Sunni buffer to weaken Syria.

That doesn’t mean the U.S. created ISIS, of course, though some of its Gulf allies certainly played a role in it—as the U.S. vice-president, Joe Biden, acknowledged last year. But there was no al-Qaida in Iraq until the U.S. and Britain invaded. And the U.S. has certainly exploited the existence of ISIS against other forces in the region as part of a wider drive to maintain western control.

The calculus changed when ISIS started beheading westerners and posting atrocities online, and the Gulf States are now backing other groups in the Syrian war, such as the Nusra Front. But this U.S. and western habit of playing with jihadi groups, which then come back to bite them, goes back at least to the 1980s war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, which fostered the original al-Qaida under CIA tutelage.

It was recalibrated during the occupation of Iraq, when U.S. forces led by General Petraeus sponsored an El Salvador-style dirty war of sectarian death squads to weaken the Iraqi resistance. And it was reprised in 2011 in

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the NATO-orchestrated war in Libya, where ISIS last week took control of Gaddafi’s home town of Sirte.

In reality, U.S. and western policy in the conflagration that is now the

Middle East is in the classic mold of imperial divide-and-rule. American forces bomb one set of rebels while backing another in Syria, and mount what are effectively joint military operations with Iran against ISIS in Iraq while supporting Saudi Arabia’s military campaign against Iranian-backed Houthi forces in Yemen. However confused U.S. policy may often be, a weak, partitioned Iraq and Syria fit such an approach perfectly.

What’s clear is that ISIS and its monstrosities won’t be defeated by the same powers that brought it to Iraq and Syria in the first place, or whose open and covert war-making has fostered it in the years since. Endless western military interventions in the Middle East have brought only destruction and division. It’s the people of the region who can cure this disease—not those who incubated the virus.

—*The Guardian*, June 3, 2017

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/03/us-isis-syria-iraq>



The Six-Day War at 50

The past 50 years of Israeli occupation. And the next

By NATHAN THRALL

Jerusalem—Three months after the 1967 war, Israel's ruling Mapai Party held a discussion on the future of the newly conquered territories. Golda Meir, who would become Israel's leader a year and a half later, asked Prime Minister Levi Eshkol what he planned to do with the more than one million Arabs now living under Israeli rule.

"I get it," Mr. Eshkol jokingly replied. "You want the dowry, but you don't like the bride!" Mrs. Meir responded, "My soul yearns for the dowry, and to let someone else take the bride."

On this 50th anniversary of the war, it is clear that over the half-century that followed, Israel managed to fulfill Mrs. Meir's wish, keeping control of the land indefinitely without wedding itself to the inhabitants. This resilient and eminently sustainable arrangement, so often mischaracterized as a state of limbo assumed to be temporary, has stood on three main pillars: American backing, Palestinian weakness and Israeli indifference. Together, the three ensure that for the Israeli government, continuing its occupation is far less costly than the concessions required to end it.

Each pillar, in turn, draws support from a core myth promoted by leaders in American, Palestinian or Israeli society. For Americans, the myth that the occupation is unsustainable is a crucial element in maintaining and excusing the United States' financial and diplomatic abetting of it. From the halls of the State Department to editorials in major newspapers and the pronouncements of pro-peace organizations like J Street, Americans are told that Israel will have to choose, and very soon, to give Palestinians either citizenship or independence, and choose

to either remain a democracy or become an apartheid state.

Yet none of these groups calls on the United States to force this supposedly imminent choice, no matter how many times Israel demonstrates that it prefers a different, far easier option—continued occupation—with no real consequences. The only real fallout from continued Israeli occupation of Palestine are major increases in American financing of it, with Israel now receiving more military assistance from the United States than the rest of the world does combined. Mistaking finger-wagging for pressure, these groups spend far too much time on phrasing their criticism of settlements and occupation, and far too little asking what can be done about it.

What supports the fiction that Israel cannot continue subjugating the Palestinians—and therefore that the United States will not be complicit in several more decades of subjugation—is a seemingly endless parade of coming perils, each of which, it is claimed or hoped, will cause Israel to end its occupation in the near future.

Initially, the threat was of an attack by the Arab states. But that soon crumbled: Israel made a separate peace with the strongest one, Egypt; the Arabs proved incapable of defending even sovereign Lebanon from Israeli invasion; and in recent years, many Arab states have failed to uphold even their longstanding boycott of Israel.

Then there was the demographic threat of a Palestinian majority arising between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. But official Israeli and Palestinian population statistics indicate that Jews have been a minority in the territory Israel controls for several years now, and with no repercussions:

A majority of the world's nations still speak of undemocratic rule by a Jewish minority as a hypothetical future, not an unacceptable present.

Later came the threat of renewed Palestinian violence. But Israel, with the strongest army in the region, has repeatedly demonstrated that it can endure and outlast whatever bursts of resistance the divided and exhausted Palestinians can muster.

The next threats, too, came up empty. The rise of nominally pro-Palestinian powers like India and China has, to date, had no negative effect on Israel, which has strengthened ties with both countries. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, though noisy on some American campuses, has yet to make a dent in Israel's economy or its citizens' self-reported level of life satisfaction, among the highest in the world.

Advocacy among some Palestinian intellectuals and their allies for enfranchisement in a single state, the so-called one-state solution, has not been endorsed by a single Palestinian faction and is a long way from drawing majority support in the West Bank and Gaza. If the proposal ever gathered momentum, Israel could easily counter it by withdrawing from the West Bank, as it did from Gaza in 2005.

The latest, though surely not the last, in this list of threats is the prospect of political changes within America and its Jewish community. Israel has become a more partisan issue, and polls show a majority of Democrats in favor of some economic sanctions or other action against Israeli settlements. Among American Jews, a growing rate of intermarriage with gentiles is lessening attachment to Israel, and Jewish organizations are increasingly divided

over support for the country. Despite such vexation, mainly among liberal Jews, surveys over nearly four decades have shown overall American backing for Israel over the Palestinians only increasing, and none of the hand-wringing has translated into changes in American policy.

For American politicians, electoral and campaign finance incentives still dictate a baseline of unconditional support for Israel. The United States has given more than \$120 billion to the country since the occupation began, spent tens-of-billions of dollars backing pro-Israel regimes ruling over anti-Israel populations in Egypt and Jordan, and provided billions more to the Palestinian Authority on condition that it continue preventing attacks and protests against Israeli settlements. And those expenditures do not reckon the cost to American security interests of Arab and Muslim resentment toward the United States for enabling and bankrolling the oppression of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

For the most part, the Palestinians themselves have done much to support the *status quo*. The myth upheld by leaders of the Palestinian government is that cooperating with Israel's occupation—which, in fact, makes the occupation less costly, more invisible to Israelis and easier to sustain—will somehow bring it to an end. This will happen, the theory goes, either because Palestinian good behavior will generate pressure from the contented Israeli public or because Israel, once deprived of excuses, will be forced by the United States and the international community to grant Palestinians their independence.

This is the myth underlying the continued support of the Oslo arrangements long after they were set to expire in 1999. It was also the basis for the two-year plan of former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to build the institutions of a Palestinian state, and for the 12 years of quiescence and close security cooperation with Israel

under President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank.

A counterpart to this myth, propounded by Israeli officials and regurgitated by American policy makers, is that Israel will not make concessions if pressured but will do so if it is warmly embraced. The historical record demonstrates the opposite.

The only real fallout from continued Israeli occupation of Palestine are major increases in American financing of it, with Israel now receiving more military assistance from the United States than the rest of the world does combined.

Severe pressure from the United States, including the threat of economic sanctions, forced Israel to evacuate Sinai and Gaza after the 1956 Suez crisis. It also compelled Israel to commit to a partial Sinai pullout in 1975. It made Israel acquiesce to the principle of its withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 war, including the West Bank, in the 1978 Camp David accords. And it obliged Israel to reverse its incursions into southern Lebanon in 1977 and 1978.

By the same token, it was Palestinian pressure, including mass demonstrations and violence, that precipitated every Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who agreed to the first Israeli pullouts from parts of the West Bank and Gaza, made his initial proposals for Palestinian self-government in 1989, when he was the defense minister attempting to quash the first intifada. Even Yitzhak Shamir,

then the prime minister and a vehement opponent of ceding territory to the Arabs, put forward an autonomy plan for Palestinians later that year.

As the intifada developed into an increasingly militarized conflict in 1993, and Israel sealed off the occupied territories in March that year, Israeli negotiators held secret meetings with Palestinians near Oslo. There, they asked for an end to the intifada and soon agreed to evacuate the military government and establish Palestinian self-rule. In 1996, the clashes and riots known as the tunnel uprising led directly to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise to negotiate a withdrawal from most of Hebron, which Israel formally committed to do several months later.

During the second intifada, rocket attacks from Gaza increased sevenfold in the year before Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced Israel would evacuate. (According to Israel's talking point, the army pulled out and got rockets; in fact, it was already getting rockets before it pulled out.) Shortly after the Gaza disengagement and the close of the intifada, a plurality of Israelis voted for the Kadima Party, led by the acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, who ran on a platform of withdrawing from the roughly 91 percent of the West Bank that lies east of the separation barrier.

As bloodshed diminished, though, Israel's sense of urgency about the Palestinian problem dissipated. No serious proposals for unilateral withdrawal were made again until the level of violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem escalated in late 2015.

Finally, for Israel, the most pervasive myth is that there is no Palestinian partner for peace. Palestinians are irredeemably rejectionist, runs this argument; they will not give up on their impossible goals and have never made real compromises, in spite of every generous Israeli proposal. The truth is that

the history of the Palestinian national movement is one long series of military defeats and ideological concessions. Each of those slowly moved the Palestine Liberation Organization from rejection of any Israeli presence to acceptance and recognition of Israel on the pre-1967 lines, compromising 78 percent of historic Palestine. For years, the international community bullied and cajoled the P.L.O. to accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, the remaining 22 percent.

When the P.L.O. finally did so, in 1988, the rug was pulled out from under it. Palestinians woke up to find that 22 percent of the homeland had been redefined as their new maximalist demand. Shimon Peres was among the few Israeli leaders to recognize the magnitude of the Palestinians' concession. He called it Israel's "greatest achievement."

In the last quarter-century of intermittent American-led negotiations, the powerlessness of the Palestinians has led to still further concessions. The P.L.O. has accepted that Israel would annex settlement blocs, consented to give up large parts of East Jerusalem,

acknowledged that any agreement on the return of Palestinian refugees will satisfy Israel's demographic concerns and agreed to various limitations on the military capabilities and sovereignty of a future state of Palestine.

During that time, Palestinians were never presented with what Israel offered every neighboring country: full withdrawal from occupied territory. Egypt obtained sovereignty over the last inch of sand in Sinai. Jordan established peace based on the former international boundary, recovering 147 square miles. Syria received a 1998 proposal from Prime Minister Netanyahu (on which he subsequently backtracked) for a total evacuation from the Golan Heights. And Lebanon achieved a withdrawal to the United Nations-defined border without granting Israel recognition, peace or even a cease-fire agreement.

The Palestinians, though, remain too weak, politically and militarily, to secure such an offer, and the United States and the international community won't apply the pressure necessary to force Israel to make one. Instead, the United States and its allies pay lip ser-

vice to the need to end the occupation, but do nothing to steer Israel from its preferred option of perpetuating it: enjoying the dowry, denying the bride.

Nathan Thrall, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group, is the author of The Only Language They Understand: Forcing Compromise in Israel and Palestine.

—*New York Times*, June 2, 2017

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/02/opinion/sunday/the-past-50-years-of-israeli-occupation-and-the-next.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=opinion-c-col-right-region®ion=opinion-c-col-right-region&WT.nav=opinion-c-col-right-region&_r=0

For American politicians, electoral and campaign finance incentives still dictate a baseline of unconditional support for Israel. The United States has given more than \$120 billion to the country since the occupation began, spent tens-of-billions of dollars backing pro-Israel regimes ruling over anti-Israel populations in Egypt and Jordan, and provided billions more to the Palestinian Authority on condition that it continue preventing attacks and protests against Israeli settlements. And those expenditures do not reckon the cost to American security interests of Arab and Muslim resentment toward the United States for enabling and bankrolling the oppression of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.



The Puzzle of Putin's Russia

How does a workers' state morph into an imperialist wannabe?

By SUSAN WILLIAMS

U.S. politicians and mainstream press are demonizing Russia with a ferocity not seen since the Cold War. Democrats blame their 2016 electoral loss on Russian hackers. Putin's regime is vilified for throwing its military might against Ukraine, annexing Crimea, and backing Assad in Syria, while ratcheting up repression at home.

In sharp contrast, some leftists see the country as part of a "heroic axis of resistance" against U.S. imperialism. Where does the truth lie?

Putin's rise from chaos

Key to unlocking Russia's nature today is to understand the cataclysms caused by the collapse of the Stalinized workers' state 26 years ago.

The Soviet economy had been stagnant for years, weakened largely by the actions of a hostile U.S. Then world oil prices took a devastating nosedive in the 1980s. At the same time, the ruling bureaucracy was being pressed by demands for democracy and a longing for Western material goods throughout the Soviet bloc, as well as by demands for self-determination among suppressed minority nations within the USSR.

Besieged on multiple fronts, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the profound economic and political changes of perestroika and glasnost. These failed to save the *status quo*, and in 1991 the USSR fragmented into 15 countries.

With the fall of the workers' state, Russia was plunged into the icy waters of neoliberal shock therapy.

State-owned property was sold at five percent or less of its value, or simply stolen, mostly by former Communist Party officials. Many factories were stripped of inventory and scrapped. Others suddenly found their suppliers and customers divided



among different countries. Central planning was abandoned. Production fell by 40-60 percent in post-Soviet states, with vital goods in short supply.

Huge numbers of people lost their jobs or worked for months unpaid. Living standards fell by 50 percent in the first year.

Hundreds-of-thousands of working people protested, to no avail. The vast majority wanted to fix the degenerated Soviet system, but not junk it. In the words of Elena Yurievna S., a former apparatchik quoted in the revelatory book *Secondhand Time*, "No one had told them there would be capitalism. ... Everyone wanted freedom, and what did they get? Yeltsin's gangster revolution."

Ex-KGB officer Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2000 on the promise of stabilizing the economy after the calamitous Yeltsin years. Riding a rising tide of oil prices, Putin was able to meet some of the direst social needs and fund the growth of a middle class. He curbed the most powerful oligarchs and began to subordinate the corporate billionaires to the governmental

bureaucracy of his United Russia party. At the same time, he outlawed all strikes as part of a crackdown on the workers' and democracy movements.

Subject to a limit of two consecutive terms as president, Putin in 2008 essentially handed the office to Dmitri Medvedev—who then appointed Putin prime minister.

Growing repression and war

Stabilization crashed to a halt in 2008 with the double whammy of world recession and plummeting oil prices, wiping out government's biggest source of income. Wages and GDP dropped again. Wealth inequality widened—Russia's is now the most extreme of any industrialized nation. Wildcat strikes and labor protests began to appear.

The administration's gloves came off, especially after Putin resumed the presidency in 2012. Political opponents were slapped with trumped-up criminal charges, even assassinated. Hundreds of protesters became "prisoners of conscience," like the feminist punk collective Pussy Riot in 2012 and Alexei Navalny and other anti-corruption activists this year.

Having lost oil profits as a means to smooth troubled waters, Putin increasingly resorted to an alternate kind of social glue: nationalist fervor and xenophobia. Putin set about creating "enemies" to draw the fire of an unhappy populace.

Muslims and Russia's myriad national minorities, who have suffered repression for centuries, are among Putin's targets. During the recent world recession, immigrants from the Northern Caucasus and from Central Asian republics that were formerly part of the USSR began flooding into urban

areas in Russia looking for work. They were initially welcomed because declining population growth meant the need for labor was acute. But now they are being scapegoated for unemployment, slandered as possible terrorists, and even hijacked to perform forced labor in remote districts.

Simultaneously, LGBTQ people have been increasingly singled out for legal suppression and violence. The rights of women have been pushed back, and domestic violence decriminalized.

High on the enemy list is “the West”—Europe and the United States. Putin has capitalized on people’s longing for the lost prestige that the Soviet Union had as the world’s second most powerful nation. This has translated into a political policy that asserts Russia’s right to insist that the countries of its “near abroad” align with its interests and policies.

The drive to become a regional power and grab a spot on the imperialist battleground has been escalating since the 1990s. First came the sup-

pression of demands for autonomy from oppressed nations within Russia’s borders, notably Chechnya. Then came the war with the ex-Soviet republic of Georgia in 2008. Putin’s assertion of Russia’s right to control the destiny of its neighbors reached a new height in 2014, fueling civil war in Ukraine and annexing the Crimean peninsula, which Ukraine still claims as its own.

The backing of Bashar al-Assad in Syria is key to realizing Putin’s ambitions for Russia as an expansionist power. Historically an ally of the USSR, Syria remains Russia’s toehold in the Middle East, host to Moscow’s military bases and access to the Mediterranean.

Redefining Russian allies

So is Russia friend or foe? Demon or champion? The answer depends on your class perspective, and on which “Russia” you are talking about—its ruling capitalist lootocracy, or its working people.

Make no mistake: Putin’s regime does not embody resistance to imperi-

alism—just the opposite. Imperialism is an international system in which the most powerful countries vie to divide up the world into spheres of corporate exploitation. The Russian government is part of this setup, maneuvering for a bigger piece of the pie. Putin and Trump are linked in a sort of elite imperialist club in which all the members are in deadly competition. Thus, the two can admire each other as strongmen while simultaneously tossing bombs at each other. (On other countries’ soil!)

So is there a “Russia” for U.S. working and oppressed people to ally with? Yes. The workers who have defied the anti-strike law across Siberia, in the Urals, and in one-factory towns; protesting laborers who link their wage demands to calls for democracy and a workers’ party; the thousands of students who marched on March 26 against corruption; and the political dissidents, queers, women and immigrants who must and are fighting back. This is where the lasting alliance between “West” and “East” will be built.

—Freedom Socialists, June 2017

<https://www.socialism.com/drupal-6.8/articles/puzzle-putin's-russia-how-does-workers'-state-morph-imperialist-wannabe>



Homeless men eat during charity event in Russia

Looting Africa

BY BENJAMIN DANGL

A recent report published by a coalition of African and British social justice organizations lays bare the truth that foreign corporations and wealthy governments continue to profit from the looting of the world's most impoverished continent.

In 2015, the year the most recent data is available, African nations received \$162 billion in aid, loans, and remittances. At the same time, \$203 billion was taken from these nations through resource extraction, debt payments, and illegal logging and fishing.

"We find that the countries of Africa are collectively net creditors to the rest of the world, to the tune of \$41.3 billion in 2015," explain authors of the report, titled "How the World Profits from Africa's Wealth."¹

"There's such a powerful narrative in Western societies that Africa is poor and that it needs our help," explained Aisha Dodwell, a campaigner with Global Justice Now, one of the organizations that authored the report.

"This research shows that what African countries really need is for the rest of the world to stop systematically looting them," Dodwell said. "While the form of colonial plunder may have changed over time, its basic nature remains unchanged."

For example, over half of the population of Africa lacks access to sufficient healthcare, with an average of only 14 health professionals for every 100,000 people.

However, Africa's wealth underground is extensive. In 2015, African nations exported some \$232 billion worth of minerals and oil to the rest of the world, South Africa contains an estimated \$2.5 trillion in mineral wealth, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) holds an estimat-

ed \$24 trillion in untapped mineral reserves.

Yet the poverty above ground persists, with 95 percent of the population in the DRC living on less than two-dollars-per-day.

The problem is that foreign companies profit the most from this resource extraction.

"Money is leaving Africa partly because Africa's wealth of natural resources is simply owned and exploited by foreign, private corporations," the report explains. "In only a minority of foreign investments do African governments have a shareholding."

"This research shows that what African countries really need is for the rest of the world to stop systematically looting them,"

Furthermore, when multinational companies do extract and export raw commodities, they typically pay very little taxes to the government, or they use tax havens to avoid paying taxes.

"Many African tax policies are the result of long standing policies of Western governments insisting on Africa lowering taxes to attract investment," the report found.

The report shows how the current model of development is futile while such plundering of the continent persists.

"Development' is a lost cause in Africa while we are hemorrhaging billions every year to extractive industries, western tax havens and illegal logging and fishing," said Bernard Adaba, a policy analyst with Integrated

Social Development Center, a research and advocacy organization in Ghana.

"Some serious structural changes need to be made to promote economic policies that enable African countries to best serve the needs of their people rather than simply being cash cows for Western corporations and governments," Adaba explained. "The bleeding of Africa must stop!"

As the Guyanese scholar and activist Walter Rodney wrote in his classic 1972 book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the root of the problem is global capitalism.

"African development," Rodney wrote, "is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries."

Benjamin Dangl has a PhD in history from McGill University and is the editor of *TowardFreedom.com*, a progressive perspective on world events.

—*Toward Freedom*, June 1, 2017

<https://towardfreedom.com/archives/africa-archives/new-report-shows-corporations-western-governments-continue-profit-looting-africa/>

¹ <http://jubileedebt.org.uk/reports-briefings/report/honest-accounts-2017-world-profits-africas-wealth>



Cuban Revolution: Still in Motion

BY DANNY HAIPHONG

A recent trip to Cuba by this author inspired the following letter. It is directed to the Cuban people. However, the deep connection between struggling workers and poor people here in the U.S. and the Cuban revolutionary process compelled this author to write the letter for audiences in the U.S. as well. In this time of crisis, it has become all the more important for people in the U.S. to begin to see themselves as part of an interconnected humanity and not merely as the beneficiaries of empire. This letter seeks to strengthen the idea of solidarity toward this end.

To the Cuban People,

The people of the U.S. owe a great debt to Cuba for the damage done by the empire that we live in. Because of U.S. imperialism's continued hostility toward Cuba, millions of struggling workers here in the U.S. have been stripped of the ability to learn from its neighbors just ninety miles away. The U.S. Empire's blockade has caused immeasurable suffering for the Cuban people and wasted precious resources better spent on the many needs of the poor and oppressed on the U.S. mainland. My visit to Cuba not only confirmed many of the aspects of the revolution that I have admired for years, but also taught me about the nuanced challenges of a revolution in motion.

What is striking about the Cuban Revolution is how deeply it is embedded in the fabric of society. It is easy to wander upon the many monuments celebrating internationalist solidarity in Cuba. Monuments to Bobby Sands, Malcolm X, Salvador Allende, and Ho Chi Minh were a sight to see, indeed. In a conversation with a representative at the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), I learned that 60,000 Cubans are currently stationed throughout the African continent for medical and technical assistance. Such assistance

is in keeping with the decades of solidarity Cuba has provided to African liberation movements fighting the scourges of colonialism and apartheid in Angola, Guinea Bissau, and Mozambique.

Walking the streets of Havana, one cannot find a single person who sleeps on the street or shelter due to homelessness.

In the U.S., internationalist solidarity is the enemy of the ruling class. The tenets of private property and profit accumulation ensure that endless war is a requirement for the empire. While tens-of-thousands of Cubans give their lives to assist in the liberation of Africa, the U.S. spends billions on maintaining instability on the continent via AFRICOM. In contrast, it was a beautiful experience to walk into a museum in Havana dedicated to African revolutionaries such as Kwame Nkrumah and Amilcar Cabral. There is no question that Cuba takes great pride in its solidarity with Africa. The revolution has developed a socialist, humanistic people so desperately needed in the homeland of war and empire.

The people of the U.S. have much to learn from Cuba's commitment to international solidarity. However, during my trip it became increasingly clear that the people of the U.S. also have much to learn from the Cuban revolution in the field of domestic achievement. Walking the streets of Havana, one cannot find a single person who sleeps on the street or shelter due to homelessness. The United States is home to millions of homeless children and families. It is also the home of a crumbling, private healthcare system

that privileges the profits of corporations over the health of the people. This is why the U.S. healthcare system is without advancements like Cuba's Heberprot-B diabetic ulcer treatment or the lung cancer vaccine, medications that would benefit large numbers of people struggling to afford care for these ailments.

Housing and healthcare are well-known achievements of the revolution, at least outside of the United States. What is even less known in the U.S., however, is the vast amount of progress the Cuban revolution has made on the questions of sexuality and gender. My trip coincided with the national campaign against homophobia and transphobia led by CENESEX. To bear witness to the thousands of people in the streets dancing in celebration of trans and queer people was one of the most stunning sites I've witnessed in person. In the U.S., Black trans and queer people are murdered at alarming rates. In Cuba, I witnessed Afro-queer Cubans marching and dancing freely without fear of reprisal.

Of course, Cuba is not a utopia and the Cuban people were the first to let me know. Many challenges exist in maintaining the gains of the revolution and building upon them. Socialist democracy can be a slow process. New foreign investors in the hospitality industry, like Air B&B, do not always meet their end of the bargain. Salaries remain low and economic growth slow. Yet despite these challenges, every Cuban that I spoke to reiterated how the revolution remains non-negotiable. A high level of political debate was evident among the people, a testament to the strong sense of ownership Cubans possess over the socialist arrangement.

My trip to Cuba also reinforced how the decades-old U.S. blockade against Cuba continues to shape the daily lives of the Cuban people. New infrastruc-

ture can be found next to crumbling infrastructure. Transportation across the island has been made more difficult since the fall of the Soviet Union. When President Raul Castro reported the need for economic growth to meet the needs of the people in 2016, he was not being dishonest. There is a general desire among the Cuban people to increase their productive and consumptive capabilities. However, a general consensus also exists that any such improvements must occur within the revolution.

But the blockade was not designed to advance the revolution; it was designed to strangle it. The hundreds-of-billions of dollars of potential wealth that has left the island since 1960 has made certain raw materials and supplies difficult for the island to obtain. By October of 2016, Obama had already fined forty-five companies for a total of 14 billion dollars in damages for attempting to do business in Cuba. The U.S. government has not stopped its ceaseless attack on the Cuban Revolution and probably never will as long as the U.S. possesses an imperialist system. This makes U.S. solidarity with Cuba all the more important in these changing times.

The single most important task for the people of the United States is to demand an end to the criminal blockade against Cuba. But first the people must understand why the blockade is criminal. They must understand how the blockade impedes the interests of not only the Cuban people, but the interests of the majority of people in the U.S. as well. As the struggling masses in the U.S. continue to suffer the maladies of capitalist rule, they will no doubt search for an alternative. My trip to Cuba confirmed that an alternative does exist. And I have the Cuban people to thank for that.

Long Live the Cuban Revolution!

—*Black Agenda Report*, May 23, 2017

https://www.blackagendareport.com/cuban_revolution_is_still_in_motion

Liquidationism Yesterday and Today

Open letter to the opposition within the “Fourth International”

Socialist Viewpoint received a proposal from a reader that we open the pages of the magazine for a discussion among political groups who consider themselves to be revolutionary socialists. The subject we proposed to the various groups was “Why should people join your organization?” As a continuation of this proposal, we are reprinting excerpts (with permission) of “Liquidationism Yesterday and Today, Open letter to the opposition within the Fourth International” submitted by *The International Bolshevik Tendency*. We continue to encourage other groups to participate in this sharing of ideas. — *The Editors*

[Socialist Action] Comrades, we read with interest your document “Opposition formed in the Fourth International,” published on February 3, 2017 on the website of *Socialist Action*, the American affiliate of the “Fourth International” (FI). This document, signed by leading comrades from France, Spain, the U.S., Canada, Italy and Greece, is a critical account of the political trajectory of your tendency over the last decade with the stated aim of initiating discussion:

“This contribution is the basis of a first unified effort to launch a debate leading to the next FI world congress. We defend the present relevance of an international that grasps the opportunities in the present situation, and that builds an international for revolution and communism. Based on the political key points of this contribution, we want to foster a broad debate addressed to revolutionary currents both inside and outside of the FI.”

You make clear that you consider your organization to be at an impasse that requires an entirely new orientation. We welcome the opportunity to discuss some of the questions raised in

this document as part of a process of political clarification that might, in the best case, lead to principled regroupment on the basis of a shared revolutionary program, but should at least help to clarify the scope and depth of the historical differences, their origins and development for all participants.

“Broad Parties:” Liquidationism of the 21st Century

The document focuses its critique on the strategy of participation in “broad parties” of the left (the *Anticapitalistas* in Spain, Syriza in Greece and Lula da Silva’s ruling party in Brazil), a policy it characterizes as a “catastrophe.” It describes how the sections that liquidated into these reformist formations began by abandoning any pretense of a revolutionary perspective and ended up supporting capitalist governments in their attacks on the working class. Yet there is a telling omission—the French *Nouveau parti anticapitaliste* (NPA) barely gets a mention. The NPA was formally launched in 2009 when the former French flagship section, the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR), dissolved in an attempt to build an all-inclusive “broad party.”

“We speak to women and men of all origins, with or without papers[,] who think their lives are worth more than profits: to youth who answer ‘resistance!’ in the face of attempts to leave them a precarious future; to activists in community groups and trade unionists who take action every day in their neighborhoods or on the job; to socialist, anti-neoliberal and communist activists, to all national and local political organizations or currents, who think it is time to unite, beyond former divisions, and above all those who have not found a party appealing enough to get involved....” —*International Viewpoint*, February 2008

As we pointed out at the time:

“The programmatic and organizational framework of the *NPA* is that of the Second International—not of the Leninist Third International or Trotsky’s Fourth International, neither of which admitted parties like the *NPA*....

“The *NPA*’s campaign for the European elections made it clear that rather than challenging the existing consciousness of its electoral base the *NPA* adapts to it. In its first official meeting, the *NPA*’s National Political Committee summed up their electoral message as advancing ‘a social, democratic and eco-friendly Europe’ and ‘an anti-militarist and anti-imperialist Europe of women’s rights’ (*Tout est à nous!* 26 March 2009).” —“*NPA: France’s New Reformist Party*,” 1917, No. 32, 2010

Some of the signatories of the opposition statement are still members of

the *NPA*, which might explain why it is barely mentioned while Syriza is openly criticized:

“In the name of the necessity of a ‘new program’ and ‘new parties’ adapted to the ‘new situation,’ the FI leadership supported Alexis Tsipras right up to the 11th hour (quote from the FI declaration of August 2015.) The example of Greece is extremely telling. It demonstrates the impossibility of reformism as a solution in periods of capitalist crisis. Not only did the Syriza-led government prove to be one of the harshest of bourgeois governments, but Syriza itself switched almost totally, in just about one year, from left reformism to bourgeois social democracy.”

This distinction between left reformism and bourgeois social democracy is meaningless. Syriza and the *NPA* are politically essentially identical—apart from the disparity in their

electoral success. The *NPA*’s goal, like Syriza’s, is to reform the existing system. Instead of seeking to overturn the mechanism that generates endless war, exploitation and oppression, these reformists aspire to help it present a greener, more humane face. Should the French electorate ever flock to the *NPA en masse* as Greek workers did to Syriza, there is no reason to expect the outcome to be different for the simple reason that “capitalism can’t be fixed,” as we pointed out to the youthful supporters of the Occupy movement several years ago.

A history of Liquidationism

There is nothing particularly new about the drive to liquidate into “broad parties.” This is essentially the same policy pursued since the 1950s by the political ancestors of today’s “Fourth International,” Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. They argued that the imminence of a global “war-revolution” meant that there was no time to build Trotskyist parties. Instead, the cadres of the Fourth International were encouraged to find permanent refuge in existing, reformist workers’ parties, whether Stalinist or social-democratic, in order to remain in touch with their working-class base and rapidly gain influence once the masses began moving to the left. The organization led by Pablo and Mandel thus developed a political orientation fundamentally opposed to that of Trotsky’s organization, rendering illegitimate the claim to the name “Fourth International,” which continues to this day.

In response to the rise of a mass of subjectively revolutionary youth and a parallel increase in combativity in the European working class in the late 1960s, Pablo and Mandel began to see new vanguards, particularly in the mass worker-student struggles in France in 1968 and Italy’s “hot autumn” of 1969.

The opportunity presented by this upsurge was enough for the Pabloite



leadership to turn away from its deep entry policy (with a few exceptions such as the British Labor Party) and call for the construction of independent, ostensibly Trotskyist organizations, the largest and most successful of which was the French *LCR*. Yet as the wave of New Leftism began to recede, the international leadership once again began to look for opportunities to merge with larger formations to their right. Ernest Mandel, in a 1976 interview, put it like this:

“In my opinion the future of the revolutionary movement is in the kind of groups which are broader than those which call themselves Trotskyist. Groupings which, however, unite with sections of the Fourth International.” —*Topo Viejo*, November 1976 (quoted in *Spartacist*, No. 25, 1978)

Even at the height of its enthusiasm for independent formations, Pablo and Mandel’s organization exhibited a tendency to politically adapt to whatever seemed currently popular with the masses. In Latin America, this meant a disastrous turn to guerrillaism, while at the same time offering electoral support to Salvador Allende’s *Unidad Popular*—a project premised on the possibility of a parliamentary road to socialism via class collaboration. Similar policies were pursued in France and elsewhere. These betrayals are documented at length in “Revolutionary Program vs. ‘Historical Process,’” a polemic between the Bolshevik Tendency and a former member who had moved into the orbit of the so-called “Fourth International.”

Capitulating to counterrevolution

This impulse to politically adapt to whatever was currently popular was particularly evident in the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet bloc in 1989-91. Despite a formal position of defending the degenerated and deformed workers’

states against capitalist restoration, in practice Mandel and Co. aligned themselves with forces that actively worked towards the counterrevolutionary destruction of the collectivized property system. In the August 1991 confrontation between conservative Stalinist elements of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the forces supporting Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin’s pro-capitalist course, Mandel came down on the side of capitalist restoration:

“The...[Stalinist] *putschists* (*coup d’état* supporters) wanted to severely limit or even suppress the democratic liberties that existed in reality. ...This is why the *putsch* had to be opposed by all means available. And this is why the failure of the *putsch* should be hailed.” —*International Viewpoint*, February 3, 1992

At the time, Mandel insisted that the conservative Stalinists behind the *coup* were no less interested in capitalist restoration than their opponents. It is true that the *coupsters* made contradictory statements about their intent to both defend the socialized property forms and respect private property, but as we commented at the time:

“A Marxist analysis of the Soviet ruling caste is not primarily based on what the bureaucrats think, much less what they say in public. The key to explaining the political behavior of different social classes and strata lies in their objective social position and the material interests that derive from it. Unlike the bourgeoisie, the Soviet bureaucracy was never a property-owning group. In August 1991, as at the height of Stalin’s power, its privileges derived from its role as custodian of the centrally administered, state-owned economy. As the power of the center came under mounting attack from rebellious nationalities, breakaway bureaucrats and free marketeers, it was natural that some sections of the

central state and party apparatus would attempt to reassert their prerogatives. This was the significance of the power struggle within the party that preceded the August *coup*, and of the *coup* attempt itself (see *IBT* September 1991 statement.)” —“Soviet Rubicon and the Left,” 1917, No. 11, 1992

Mandel and his followers took a different attitude to Cuba, aware that since the 1960s Cuba has remained more popular among radical youth and workers than the Soviet Union. Although the USSR was created by a workers’ revolution and underwent a process of degeneration while Cuba was deformed from its inception, from a Marxist point of view, the two states were essentially similar in nature. Both were based on collectivized property, which is why Marxists defended them against capitalist restoration, but with a Stalinist ruling caste, which monopolized political control and represented a transmission belt for capitalist influence. In both cases the road to socialism could only be opened by a proletarian political revolution to break the grip of the bureaucratic stratum and establish the direct rule of the working class....

We are sending this in the spirit of your expressed desire “to foster a broad debate addressed to revolutionary currents both inside and outside of the FI.” We agree that such a debate about the historic roots of the current profound global crisis of proletarian leadership is of immense importance and we look forward to further exchanges on these critical questions.

Comradely greetings,

Christoph Lichtenberg, for the International Bolshevik Tendency

—*International Bolshevik Tendency*, June 2, 2017

http://www.bolshevik.org/statements/ibt_20170610_liquidationism.html

21st Century Barbarism

Corporate power, militarism, and the tragedy of American science

By CLIFF CONNER

The Earth Day 2017 March for Science signals resistance to Donald Trump's sharp infusion of irrationality into the national discourse. Official support for climate-change denial and other anti-science agendas has suddenly become much more explicit. At the same time, many protesters recognize a continuity linking Trump's bizarre bluster with a pre-existing condition sometimes referred to as the "Republican war on science."

But the problems at the root of the tragedy of contemporary American science—its corporatization and militarization—are not ones for which either the Democratic or Republican parties can offer solutions.

Describing science as tragedy would have seemed peculiar to most people as recently as the first half of the 20th century. The reputation of science was then golden. The expectation that modern science could and soon would solve all of humanity's problems was almost universal.

That benign image received a double jolt during the Second World War. First came the horrors of Nazi racial science and its accompanying technology of human extermination. That was followed by the advent of the nuclear age in the instant incineration of a hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants of two Japanese cities. J. Robert Oppenheimer, one of the atomic bomb's creators, invoked the name of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, to signal the emergence of science's ominous dark side.

The roots of the tragedy

The out-of-control proliferation and use of weapons of mass destruc-

tion is perhaps the worst of contemporary science's tragic fruits, but there are others. The misuse and abuse of science to justify destroying the Earth's habitability has also become a source of widespread anxiety.

These and other perils have a common root: the corruption of Big Science by Big Money. More precisely, they are the consequence of a profit-driven economic system that hamstring's humanity's ability to make rational economic decisions.

American science's primary mission is to find new and more efficient ways to kill people—from thermonuclear bombs, to robot drones, to cluster munitions, to antipersonnel weaponry of many kinds.

Science is presumed to be a reliable source of knowledge based on objective fact rather than subjective bias. By definition, that requires research to be conducted impartially by scientists with no conflicts of interest that could affect their judgment. But a science harnessed to the maximization of private profits cannot avoid material conflicts of interest that are anathema to objectivity.

The focus on American science is not chauvinistic bias on my part. The science of the United States is the major component of world science—

as American science goes, so goes science in general. The American federal Research and Development budget is larger than those of Germany, France, Great Britain, and Japan combined. American science's primary competition vanished in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1998 science in Russia and the other Soviet spin-offs was on the edge of extinction, surviving only by means of charitable donations from abroad.

The idea that anything about American science could be tragic may seem a bit unsettling to some readers. It does not at all jibe with American Exceptionalism, an axiom of the ideology that reigns supreme in the public discourse of the United States. American Exceptionalism covers all things American with a halo of virtuousness and a blanket of immunity from wrongdoing.

Furthermore, isn't the United States where most of world's scientific and technological innovations have been and still are produced? How about airplanes? Television? The computer? The Internet? The iPhone? And hasn't American science been responsible for great medical and biochemical advances? The current state of American science may present some difficulties and challenges, but isn't it gross hyperbole to call it a tragedy? Unfortunately, it is not.

The corporate takeover

As corporate domination of science and technology has grown, the ideal of objective scientific investigation has diminished accordingly. Big Science has increasingly become the deferential servant of corporate interests and billionaires. Allegedly scientific studies

are now routinely conducted by individuals and institutions with large financial stakes in their outcome.

Big Oil and Big Coal fund climate-change-denial studies. Big Tobacco produces findings minimizing the link between smoking and lung cancer. Big Pharma investigates the benefits and risks of the medicines it sells. Big Food enlists nutritional science as a marketing tool for their products.

The scientific method has been refashioned to fit the new reality. “Hypothesis-driven research” now signifies formulating propositions to advance corporate interests and designing studies to provide evidence for them. Investigations that produce a semblance of support for a desired hypothesis are accorded full public relations treatment, while those that do not are quietly consigned to the paper shredder.

The results of all this research are at worst fraudulent and at best untrustworthy. And yet, abetted by venal legislators and a credulous mass media, corporate science-for-profit shapes the public discourse and public policy that adversely affect our environment and our health.

Institutionalization of science for profit

There are rational voices in the public discourse that have raised concerns and warnings about the corruption of science by Big Money, but the voices serving the corporate interests have all but drowned them out. By skillful application of the false-equivalence fallacy, the latter have managed to skew the conversation far to the irrational side.

Manipulating research results to serve private commercial interests is anti-science masquerading as science. The forces of anti-science have strong institutional support in the United States, most significantly in our fundamental political institutions.

One dangerous result has been the weakening of governmental regulation of commercial activities that contaminate the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the medicines we take. The ability of the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration to provide the oversight they were designed to provide has significantly declined. And the Trump gang promises to accelerate that trend; the regulatory environment is sure to get worse before it gets better.

Politicians’ appeals to ignorance are

...more than half of the Research and Development funding—amounting to trillions of dollars over the past decades—has been for military purposes...

not the only weapons in the effort to undermine the integrity of American science. University research laboratories and Think Tanks alike have devolved into intellectual brothels in their ignoble quest for corporate funding to support their research. Private interests have been happy to oblige, and the obvious *quid pro quo* need never be spoken aloud.

The militarization of American science

But the most tragic distortion of American science is a consequence of its extreme militarization. Big Science literally exploded onto the scene as a result of the Manhattan Project during World War II. Its success was validated by mushroom clouds rising over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, thus establishing the martial inclination of Big Science’s subsequent development.

If you take one thing away from reading this article, let it be this: Today, American science’s primary mission is to find new and more efficient ways to kill people—from thermonuclear bombs, to robot drones, to cluster munitions, to antipersonnel weaponry of many kinds.

Science and technology, rather than being the creative engines of human progress, have instead been reoriented toward destructive and anti-human ends. American science has also made beneficial advances, but many of those have been accidental byproducts of military research.

The proof is in the U.S. budget, where more than half of the Research and Development funding—amounting to trillions of dollars over the past decades—has been for military purposes.

Imagine, by contrast, what could be accomplished if all of that money and all of that scientific talent were instead directed toward finding solutions to the crucial problems facing the human race today, such as poverty, hunger, disease, and environmental devastation. But they are not, and if that isn’t a tragedy, the word holds no meaning. Meanwhile, massive war spending begets massive weapons production that begets ever-escalating aggression that begets human tragedy of mind-numbing dimensions.

The tragedy deepens with the realization that this is a problem that cannot be fixed—at least not in the context of present American reality. That is due to the American economy’s absolute, hopeless, incurable addiction to military spending.

The metaphor of drug addiction is not nearly strong enough. Some heroin addicts, with great difficulty, sometimes get the monkey off their backs, but American society as currently structured is completely incapable of breaking its addiction to militarism. War spending in the American economy is more like an inoperable tumor

destined to grow uncontrollably until it kills its host.

How did the military become everything?

This fatal malignancy, not surprisingly, has been downplayed in the public discourse of the United States. President Eisenhower's 1961 warning about the dangers of the "military-industrial complex" is well known, but the conversation went no further. Nonetheless, a recently published book sports a title suggesting that perhaps it may finally be breaking into the national conversation: *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*. By stating the problem so bluntly, the author, Rosa Brooks, has done us a service by acknowledging its existence, but her proposed solution—to increase the military budget!—is downright Orwellian. Or Strangeloveian.

The attention-grabbing assertion that the military has become everything is meant figuratively, not literally. But the military's death grip on the federal budget and its Research and Development component is real enough and the question is: How did it come about? If the United States were ruled by a military dictatorship it would be understandable, but that is not the case. To think the Pentagon drives the process is to believe the tail wags the dog.

Nor are the elected politicians primarily to blame for handing the generals the keys to the treasury. Concerned above all with satisfying the big-money benefactors who butter their bread, the legislators simply *kowtow* to irresistible economic forces they don't understand and feel no need to understand. The addiction to military spending is built into our economic system.

This dilemma has a name—a two-word phrase that sounds terribly academic, but is useful as a shorthand way to identify the problem: "Weaponized Keynesianism."

Here is the obvious kernel of Weaponized Keynesianism: If you think the American economy is having a hard time now generating enough jobs to keep unemployment from rising to the skies, just imagine what it would be like without the hundreds-of-billions of dollars a year in military spending.

In the United States today, if the Pentagon ceased to provide a gigantic artificial market for industrial production, millions of workers—and not only defense-plant workers—would lose their livelihoods. Without paychecks they would be unable to buy things and the wheels of the economy would rapidly grind to a halt. It would not be merely a repeat of the Great Depression; it would be the ultimate demise of the current global economy.

War spending in the American economy is more like an inoperable tumor destined to grow uncontrollably until it kills its host.

American Exceptionalism

Most Americans, unfortunately, are oblivious to the military domination of American science and all that it entails. It is a society-wide blind spot. What could account for the collective inability to see this monstrosity ballooning before our eyes? It follows from accepting, consciously or unconsciously, the doctrine of American Exceptionalism.

American Exceptionalism is the contention that the United States is not bound by traditional norms of morality in international affairs. Invading other peoples' countries and killing them when they resist is generally considered war crimes most foul. Also, the use of torture has been condemned as immoral and repugnant by all civilized peoples

since the 18th-century Enlightenment. When the United States invades, kills, and tortures, however, it is deemed acceptable because America is allegedly a benevolent superpower that acts only in defense of peace, democracy, and human rights.

This normalizes the outrageously inflated, runaway American arms production as all being in a good cause. It serves as the rationale for a "national security state" that monitors the private communications of everyone in the country and spawns secret terrorism tribunals that dangerously erode the rule of law. But because American Exceptionalism has served as the ideological justification for many wars resulting in many millions of deaths all over the globe, it is long overdue for critical examination.

But all is not lost! (Breaking out of the box.)

Does the preceding litany of woe seem to imply unavoidable doom and destruction of the entire social order? That is not my intention. The current tragedy of American science may appear to lead to a hopeless impasse, but there is a way out.

It is not an easy way out. To comprehend it requires some serious thinking outside the box. In this case, the box is the market-based, profits-driven economic system that almost all American commentators and ideologues take for granted, as if no alternative system is possible or even worth mentioning.

This has, for many decades, been a strong, indestructible box that has successfully imprisoned the minds and constrained the thinking of almost the entire American public. But the 2016 elections began, perhaps, to reveal stress fractures in the box. The campaign of Bernie Sanders brought the word socialism into the public discourse as something other than a swear word for the first time in most Americans' living memory.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO GO BANKRUPT EVERY YEAR BECAUSE OF MEDICAL BILLS

BRITAIN	0
FRANCE	0
JAPAN	0
GERMANY	0
CANADA	0
NETHERLANDS	0
SWITZERLAND	0

USA | **643,000**

Source: Nerdwallet Health Analysis

I do not believe Bernie Sanders' candidacy offered a solution to the crucial conundrum of Weaponized Keynesianism that threatens to engulf the planet in thermonuclear flames. The record of his quarter century as Senator and Congressman from Vermont reveals that he is an unreliable bulwark against military spending and war. While criticizing "excessive" defense budgets, he frequently voted to approve them, and to approve military aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Somalia and elsewhere, demonstrating that he posed no real challenge to the warhawks' agenda.

However, the 2016 Sanders campaign deserves a great deal of credit for popularizing the idea of socialism, and de-stigmatizing it, among young people in America. At least that now opens the way for serious discussion of alternatives to the current American economic system.

That discussion is essential to breaking out of the death spiral of war spending and warfare. Discussion is certainly not enough. If words don't lead to organization and action, then the problem will remain unsolved. But the discussion is nonetheless crucial.

One element of that discussion is whether science and technology can be

reoriented from destructive to creative purposes by a transformation of the economic system. Fortunately, history does offer some important indications of how genuine, unfettered science might fare in a post-capitalist economy. Examining that history demonstrates that scientific advance is not, as pro-capitalist ideologues claim, dependent upon material incentives to private enterprise. The most heartening examples are in the Cuban medical sciences.

Our daunting challenge

The tragedy of American science today is that its direction is determined by private profit considerations rather than by the desire to improve the human condition. As a result, Big Science has been irredeemably corrupted by Big Money. That corruption threatens the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, and the medicines we take.

The U.S. economy's addiction to military spending distorts and deforms science by making it overwhelmingly subservient to military interests. This transforms science's classic ideal as a creative force for the advancement of humankind into its destructive and

antihuman opposite. That trillions of dollars in resources and scientific talent are devoted to warfare rather than to solving the problems of poverty, disease, and environmental destruction is among the greatest tragedies in all of human history.

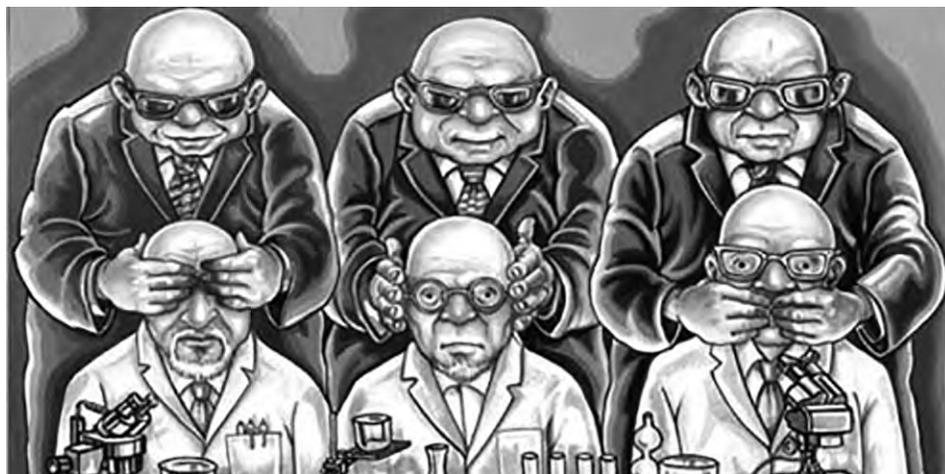
The Bernie Sanders experience once again reveals that there is no "progressive wing" of the Democratic Party that can offer a genuine challenge to the corporatization and militarization of American science.

The hopeful note in all of this is that replacing the current science-for-profit system by a science-for-human-needs system is not an impossible, utopian dream. To make it a reality, however, requires a fundamental restructuring of our society. That is the great, daunting challenge facing today's youth and the generations to come. It is by no means melodramatic to say that the survival of the human race depends on their success.

Cliff Conner is the author of A People's History of Science. He is currently writing a book on the history of American science from World War II to the present.

—*Climate and Capitalism*, May 2, 2017

<http://climateandcapitalism.com/2017/05/02/corporate-power-militarism-tragedy-american-science/>



First Dakota Access Pipeline Spill

“We have always said it’s not if, but when, pipelines leak”

BY DEIRDRE FULTON

June 16, 2017 update: This week, a federal judge ruled that the Trump administration failed to fully consider the environmental impacts of the Dakota Access Pipeline when it issued a permit for its construction. The judge ordered the administration to conduct further environmental review. ...U.S. District Judge James E. Boasberg found that the Army Corps “failed to adequately consider the impacts of an oil spill on Standing Rock’s fishing and hunting rights and on environmental justice.”¹

Throughout the battle over the Dakota Access pipeline (DAPL), Indigenous campaigners and their allies repeatedly warned it was not a question of if, but when a breach would occur.

Now, before the pipeline is even fully operational, those warnings have come to fruition.

The Associated Press reports May 10, 2017:

“The Dakota Access pipeline leaked 84 gallons of oil in South Dakota early last month, which an American Indian tribe says bolsters its argument that the pipeline jeopardizes its water supply and deserves further environmental review.

“The April 4 spill was relatively small and was quickly cleaned up, and it didn’t threaten any waterways. The state’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources posted a report in its website’s searchable database, but it didn’t take any other steps to announce it to the public, despite an ongoing lawsuit by four Sioux tribes seeking to shut down the pipeline.”

“At the pipeline’s pump station there’s what’s called a surge tank, which is used to store crude oil occasionally during the regular operation of the pipeline,” Brian Walsh, an environmental scientist with the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources Ground Water

Quality Program, told *Dakota Media Group*. “And connected to that tank is a pump, which pumps oil back into the pipeline system, and the leak occurred at that surge pump.”

The pipeline operated by Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners (ETP) is expected to be in service by June 1.

“As far as this happening during the start-up, I don’t want to make it sound like a major event, but the fact that you had oil leaving the tank says there’s something not right with their procedures,” longtime pipeline infrastructure expert Richard B. Kuprewicz said to *Dakota Media Group*. “They might have been trying to hurry.”

Joye Braun, of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe (one of those still engaged in a legal battle to shut down the pipeline), cited Kuprewicz when explaining why the news was so concerning.

“This leak hits close to home, my home,” Braun said. “We have always said it’s not if, but when, pipelines leak, and to have someone like Richard B. Kuprewicz—a pipeline infrastructure expert and incident investigator with more than 40 years of energy industry experience—question the integrity and building practices of Dakota Access says something pretty serious could go wrong.”

“That worries me,” she continued. “South Dakota already faces water shortages and our livelihoods depend on water, from ranching and farming to healthcare. Do we have more spills just waiting to happen? This is our home, our land, and our water. This just proves their hastiness is fueled by greed not in the best interest for tribes or the Dakotas.”

News from elsewhere in the country this week hardly helps ETP’s case.

Following two spills of millions of gallons of drilling fluids into Ohio wet-

lands last month, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has “curtailed work” on ETP’s Rover gas pipeline, the *Washington Post* reported Wednesday, May 10, 2017.

After the spills and 18 reported leaks, the *Post* reported, FERC blocked Energy Transfer Partners, which also built the controversial Dakota Access pipeline, from starting horizontal drilling in eight areas where drilling has not yet begun. In other areas, where the company has already begun horizontal drilling, the FERC said drilling could continue.

The FERC also ordered the company to double the number of environmental inspectors and to preserve documents the commission wants to examine as it investigates the spills.

Meanwhile, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency earlier this week fined ETP \$430,000 for damaging the wetland, which an agency spokesman has said “will likely not recover to its previous condition for decades.”

Responding to the South Dakota incident, Dallas Goldtooth of the *Indigenous Environmental Network* said, “We fear more spills will come to bear, which is an all too frequent situation with Energy Transfer Partners pipeline projects. As such, eyes of the world are watching and will keep Dakota Access and Energy Transfer Partners accountable.”

—*Common Dreams*, May 10, 2017

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/05/10/told-you-so-everyone-was-dreading-first-dapl-spill-reported>

1 “Judge Finds That DAPL Approval Violated Law”

By Anna Lee, Bobbi Jean the Oceti Sakowin Youth
<https://www.change.org/p/jo-ellen-darcy-stop-the-dakota-access-pipeline>

Louisiana's Cancer Alley

Residents push back against industrial polluters

BY JULIE DERMANSKY

A group of residents in St. Gabriel, a suburb of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is no stranger to industrial pollution. The small town is on the banks of the Mississippi River in a stretch of land between New Orleans and Baton Rouge containing more than 100 petrochemical factories. To the industry, it's known as the "Petrochemical Corridor," but to everyone else it's "Cancer Alley." This fact is fueling a local drive to stop any new industrial plans that would add to the area's already heavy pollution burden.

The Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN) has been assisting the Citizens for a Better St. Gabriel, a citizens group formed with the goal of halting one such company from expanding operations in their neighborhood.

The company, Adsorbent Solutions, has run an industrial recycling facility in St. Gabriel since 2008, and is already on the hook for a \$30,000 fine from state regulators for non-compliance, which includes polluting a local waterway and violating Clean Air Act permits repeatedly in recent years.

Adsorbent Solutions has requested the necessary permits for its expansion from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and St. Gabriel's City Council. DEQ has granted the company the air modification permit it needs, but the city council denied the request to rezone and expand its size.

But with the company's state permit in hand, residents fear it will challenge the city's authority to stop the expansion. Representatives from Adsorbent Solutions said it isn't going anywhere; likely ruling out some residents' hope the company would leave the area entirely.

LEAN is not waiting for Adsorbent Solution's next move. The environmental group took legal action against DEQ by filing a petition in the 19th District Court, asking a judge to review the state's decision to grant an air permit modification.

LEAN argues DEQ didn't meet its obligations under the state constitution to protect the public and the environment. Its petition says the DEQ's decision creates "unacceptable risks" to people living near the plant. Furthermore, the petition states:

"Of particular concern is its repeated failure to burn the industrial hazardous pollutants it is supposed to clean at the minimum temperature required by its permit and failing to use the required pollution control devices."

Marylee Orr, executive director of LEAN, is disappointed in many of DEQ's recent actions. This is her first time in nearly 30 years of dealing with the regulatory agency that it has failed to send a written response dealing with concerns raised at the hearing to those who testified against a permit application, something which, she says, DEQ is required to do.

I asked DEQ if it had sent a response to anyone who testified against the permit at the hearing but didn't get an answer. DEQ spokesperson Greg Langley said via email he wouldn't be able comment on any questions about a legal action.

Fenceline Community in St. Gabriel

"My house no longer feels like my castle because every day I worry about the quality of the air," Brenda York told me when I visited her in St. Gabriel. York is part of the Citizens for a Better St. Gabriel.

"Everyone in our community either has cancer or knows someone close to them who has cancer, or has died of cancer," Eugene Willis told me, echoing a common refrain from others living in Cancer Alley. He and Reginald Grace, both members of the citizens group, took me on a tour of the industrial facilities in the area.

I got a whiff of the odor they often confront when we stopped in front of the Adsorbent Solutions facility. Smoke was rising from the outdoor operations. Jesse Brooks, who works at the facility, came over to see what we were doing. We asked him what kind of chemicals were burning. "We aren't burning anything hazardous here," Brooks insisted.

I asked what was causing the odor, and he said he would go back and "check what the problem is." I never got my answer. When I asked Brooks the same question at a St. Gabriel City Council meeting weeks later, he refused to answer after establishing that I was a member of the press.

Many in the community are convinced that Adsorbent Solutions is the source of the foul smell that has plagued their neighborhood for years. "It isn't hard to figure out the source of a rotten smell," said Willis, who often drives to the facility to confirm the odor's source before calling DEQ to make a complaint.

After we drove away from Adsorbent Solutions, Willis again called DEQ to report the foul odor. Almost a week later, the agency's response consisted of asking whether he still smelled the emissions. "A ridiculous question to ask nearly a week later," Willis said. The odors come and go, depending on the plant's activities and wind direction, he said.

Community members worry that their health-related problems are a result of emissions from Adsorbent Solutions. Wilma Subra, technical advisor for LEAN, told me that the community has good reason to be concerned. The health impacts they describe, from shortness of breath to various forms of cancer, match those associated with the chemicals the facility deals with. Some of the compounds involved are known “cancer causing agents” including benzene and formaldehyde.

Who does the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality represent?

At a recent legislative session, Chuck Carr Brown, the DEQ secretary appointed by Governor John Bell Edwards, spoke out against a bill which would require companies found non-complaint three times to install fence-line air monitors. Brown explained that DEQ already had the authority to require companies to do just that.

The bill, HB 394, was voted down, a move that left some residents in St. Gabriel disappointed. At DEQ’s permit hearing in March, St. Gabriel community members requested air monitoring along the Adsorbent Solutions fence line, citing the company’s past record of non-compliance and recent odor issues. However, they fear the request fell on deaf ears.

When Brown took over DEQ in 2016, he told reporters he thought it was important to listen to the voices of those who live in fence-line communities. Though Brown has met with members of LEAN and the GreenARMY, a coalition of Louisiana environmental groups, many in the communities LEAN is working with don’t feel DEQ is listening to their concerns at all.

Brown told Orr he was willing to meet with the Concerned Citizens for a Better St. Gabriel after DEQ gave Adsorbent Solutions the permit, but Reginald Grace, one of the group’s

leaders, told Orr he was not interested in meeting with Brown at this time. He said the group would have been happy to meet before the decision was made, but after, Grace saw no point.

Brown previously referred to another Cancer Alley citizens group LEAN works with, the Concerned Citizens of St. John the Baptist, as fear mongers. That group continues to voice its concerns that DEQ is not doing enough to protect their community, despite the Environmental Protection Agency warning that parts of the area have the nation’s highest risk of air pollution-caused cancer.

DEQ’s new permit allows Adsorbent Solutions to increase the amount of toxic air pollutants the facility releases annually by a factor of nearly two-and-a-half, from 2.90 tons to 7.22 tons per year

The group in St. John the Baptist recently initiated a public awareness campaign about its plight. Members are taking to the streets in front of schools, holding up signs with warnings about the pollutants in the air and handing out fact sheets.

Adsorbent Solutions president goes off-script at council meeting

At a St. Gabriel City Council meeting on April 20, the day after DEQ approved Adsorbent Solutions’ permit, lawyers for the com-

pany made their case for the expansion plan, claiming it would benefit the community because of the company’s plans to employ state-of-the-art pollution prevention devices. They beseeched the city council to follow DEQ’s lead, referring to the state’s consideration of the matter as sufficiently rigorous for the city as well.

However, as Subra pointed out on behalf of LEAN, DEQ’s new permit allows Adsorbent Solutions to increase the amount of toxic air pollutants the facility releases annually by a factor of nearly two-and-a-half, from 2.90 tons to 7.22 tons per year.

Absorbent Solutions president Stewart Fulton publicly pleaded his company’s case at the council meeting. He blamed other facilities in the area for the air pollution. His company’s non-compliance problems had been resolved with DEQ and now things are all about moving forward, he said. Fulton asserted that he is a Christian and that “God wants me to do this for the community.”

Gasps could be heard at the meeting when he invoked God, and a couple people snickered. But his religious reference didn’t sway the council members, who unanimously rejected the zoning request.

The work of Citizens for a Better St. Gabriel is only beginning. On May 22, word spread about another company asking to rezone in order to build an industrial facility in the neighborhood. Though the company’s plans aren’t yet clear, the community group is readying itself for a new battle, taking to heart the rallying cry of retired Lt. General Russel Honoré, founder of the GreenARMY: “The only one who will save us is us.”

—DESMOG, May 28, 2017

<https://www.desmogblog.com/2017/05/28/louisiana-cancer-alley-residents-push-back-against-industrial-polluters>

Oil and Plastic are Choking the Planet

By DAVID SUZUKI WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM DAVID SUZUKI FOUNDATION SENIOR EDITOR IAN HANINGTON.

People who deny that humans are wreaking havoc on the planet's life-support systems astound me. When confronted with the obvious damage we're doing to the biosphere—from climate change to water and air pollution to swirling plastic patches in the oceans—some dismiss the reality or employ logical fallacies to discredit the messengers.

It's one thing to argue over solutions, but to reject the need for them is suicidal. And to claim people can't talk about fossil fuels and climate change because they use fossil fuel-derived products, such as plastic keyboards, is nonsensical.

There's no denying that oil, coal and gas are tremendously useful. They hold super-concentrated energy from the sun and are used to make a variety of products, from medicines to lubricants to plastics. The problems aren't the resources but our profligate use of them. Using them more wisely is a start. In many cases, we also have alternatives.

The problems aren't the resources but our profligate use of them.

Burning oil, coal and gas to propel inefficient automobiles and generate electricity illustrates the problem. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, about 14 to 30 percent of a gasoline-powered car's fuel is used to propel the vehicle. That energy is mostly moving a ton of car, which often holds one 80-kilogram person. That's a lot of fuel and energy to transport one or two people.

Looked at this way, even electric or hybrid personal vehicles aren't terribly efficient, but they at least pollute less than gas-powered vehicles—and the EPA notes 74 to 94 percent of an electric car's energy goes to moving the

vehicle and its passengers. Energy-efficient or electric vehicles are moving in the right direction, but public transit and active transport such as cycling and walking are better alternatives.

Fossil fuel power plants are also inefficient. Only about a third of the power generated reaches consumers. More is lost through wasteful household or business use. A lot of energy is also required to extract, process and transport fuels to power plants. Because of the many methods of generating and supplying electricity with renewable sources such as solar, wind and geothermal, it's tough to put exact numbers on efficiency, but far less power is wasted. Because the energy sources are inexhaustible and don't produce emissions, waste isn't as big a concern as with fossil fuels—although it's still important.

Most plastics are also made from oil—which presents another set of problems. As with fuels, people started making plastics from oil because it was inexpensive, plentiful and easy for corporations to exploit and sell. Our consume-and-profit economic system meant automakers once designed cars not to be efficient but to burn more fuel than necessary. Likewise, manufacturers create far more plastic products than necessary. Many items don't serve much purpose beyond making money. Sometimes the packaging is worth more than the contents!

It's so bad that researchers from Australia's University of Tasmania and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds recently found 18 tons of plastic garbage—239 items-per-square-meter—scattered across a small South Pacific island 5,000 kilometers from the nearest human occupation. Scientists have also found massive, swirling patches of plastic in the North and South Pacific oceans, each holding around 400,000 plastic par-

ticles per-square-kilometer. University of Tasmania researcher Jennifer Lavers said plastic in the oceans could be as great a threat as climate change. "You put carbon dioxide into the atmosphere or plastic in the oceans and both will stick around," she told *New Scientist*.

...we should recycle everything already produced. Plastics can also be made from renewable resources, such as hemp, or any fast-growing plant that contains cellulose.

As with fossil fuels, the first step to addressing the problem is to substantially reduce plastics usage. There are also alternatives. To begin, we should recycle everything already produced. Plastics can also be made from renewable resources, such as hemp, or any fast-growing plant that contains cellulose. In fact, plastics were once commonly made from animal products such as horn and tusks, but when those became expensive, people started using plants, switching to oil products when that became more profitable.

We can and must cut down on fossil fuels and plastics. We also have alternatives, and ways to prevent plastics from ending up in the oceans. Those who look away and pretend we don't have a problem are only slowing solutions and accelerating our self-destruction.

—David Suzuki Foundation, May 25, 2017

<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/science-matters/2017/05/oil-and-plastic-are-choking-the-planet/>

America's Toxic Prisons

The environmental injustices of mass incarceration

BY CANDICE BERND, ZOE LOFTUS-FARREN AND MAUREEN NANDINI MITRA

Matthew Morgenstern is convinced his Hodgkin's lymphoma was caused by exposure to toxic coal ash from the massive dump right across the road from SCI Fayette, a maximum-security prison in LaBelle, Pennsylvania, where he is currently serving a five- to ten-year sentence. "In 2010 and until I left in 2013, the water always had a brown tint to it. Not to mention the dust clouds that used to come off the dump trucks... which we all breathed in.... Every single day I would wake up and there would be a layer of dust on everything," he writes from inside the prison. When Morgenstern was sent back to SCI Fayette in 2016 after he violated parole, he found that the dust issue had abated a bit—work at the dump has been stalled for a year due to litigation—but the water still runs brownish and sometimes has "a funky smell." He says he knows that the environment in and around the prison is still "messed up" and he's concerned that his immune system, already weakened from fighting and overcoming cancer, won't be able to withstand another onslaught of toxic exposure. "I myself have no doubt that if I'm kept here at Fayette, I will once again become sick," he writes.

Likewise, in Navasota, Texas, Keith Milo Cole and John Wesley Ford, aging prisoners at the Wallace Pack Unit, worry about how their prolonged exposure to arsenic-laced water and extreme heat during summer months may have affected their health over the long term. Like Morgenstern, Cole says the water at his unit was brown until a federal judge ordered the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to provide the prisoners safe drinking water. "It used to be where you could take a white wash rag and put it in the sink and water would run

on it about 10 or 15 minutes, and it would actually turn brown," says Cole, who is serving a life sentence.

Farther west, in California, Kenneth Hartman was nearly 30 years into a life sentence when he contracted valley fever in 2008 at the California State Prison in Lancaster. The infection, caused by inhaling a soil-dwelling fungus, can be devastating. Though it is often mistaken for the common flu, it can kill people or leave those infected with lifelong symptoms. "The intensity or severity [of my symptoms] kept increasing to the point that I clearly

...at least 589 federal and state prisons are located within three miles of a Superfund cleanup site on the National Priorities List, with 134 of those prisons located within just one mile

remember thinking, if I get any sicker, I'm going to die," Hartman says, writing from Lancaster where he is still incarcerated. "My physical strength was near to zero. ...I had a persistent dry cough, severe night sweats and bouts of vertigo that rendered me practically immobile."

The plight of these prisoners points to a nationwide problem that's inextricably linked to power imbalances within the U.S. criminal legal system—a system in which prisoners are often out of sight and thus out of the public mind.

As a special investigation by *Truthout* and *Earth Island Journal*

shows, the toxic impact of prisons extends far beyond any individual prison, or any specific region in the United States. Though some prisons provide particularly egregious examples, mass incarceration in the U.S. impacts the health of prisoners, prison-adjacent communities and local ecosystems from coast to coast.

A 700 percent increase in prisoner population

The U.S. locks up more people *per capita* than any other nation in the world. According to the *Prison Policy Initiative*, currently some 2.3 million people are confined in more than 6,000 prisons, jails and detention centers operated by multiple federal, state, county and private actors. That's about the population of Houston, Texas, the fourth largest city in the nation.

Since the 1970s, the U.S. has seen a 700 percent increase in the number of people imprisoned, a result of the growth in "tough on crime" and "war on drugs" policies, as well as a concerted effort to control and minimize the power of social movements and other forms of resistance from within communities of color, says David Naguib Pellow, a professor of environmental studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who's writing a book on prisons and environmental justice. The rate at which we lock people up today is some five-times higher than most countries, even though the crime rate in the U.S. is comparable to that of other stable, industrialized nations.

Holding large groups of people in closed facilities brings with it a host of associated civil and human rights problems—problems that have been well documented. But until recently,

not much thought or research had been expended on the connections between mass incarceration and environmental issues, that is, problems that arise when prisons are sited on or near toxic sites, as well as when prisons themselves become sources of toxic contamination.

Paul Wright, executive director of the Human Rights Defense Center, was among the few people who began to look into this connection on a broad scale nearly three decades ago. When Wright was serving time in Washington State's McNeil Island prison in the 1990s, the tap water there too, used to run brown. "Yet the prison officials would be putting up signs saying the water is safe to drink," he recalls. "There were a lot of environmental issues going on within the prison. It got me thinking. Just seeing how the prisons were on everything, I didn't think they would be any better on the environment."

So Wright, who along with fellow prisoner Ed Mead, had recently started publishing *Prison Legal News*—a magazine where prisoners and their families speak up about criminal legal policy and reform—began filing public records requests for water pollution related complaints in state and federal prisons across the country. "Sure enough, we got all kinds of stuff back saying that the prisons were literally sources of toxic pollution," he says. In 2007, *Prison Legal News* published findings from 17 states exposing issues related to sewage and sanitation violations in dozens of prisons.

Once he got out in 2003 after serving 17 years, Wright expanded *Prison Legal News* into the Human Rights Defense Center, a Florida-based non-profit that advocates on behalf of people held in U.S. detention facilities. In 2014, the Center launched the Prison Ecology Project, which Wright says aims "first and foremost" to map the extent of the intersections between mass incarceration and environmental

degradation, and then "do something to change it."

"People [on the outside] generally aren't thinking of prisons and jails as environmental problems or as places where people have legitimate concerns about the environment," Wright says.

It's well known that low-income communities and communities of color are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation. Polluting facilities are more likely to be built in these communities, and environmental regulations are often less stringently enforced in these neighborhoods. This legacy of environmental injustice extends to the siting of prisons, which, too, are often located in or close to low-income communities. Additionally, they are built on some of the least desirable and most contaminated lands in the country, such as old mining sites, Superfund cleanup sites and landfills. According to a GIS [geographic information system] analysis of a 2010 dataset of state and federal prisons by independent cartographer Paige Williams, at least 589 federal and state prisons are located within three miles of a Superfund cleanup site on the National Priorities List, with 134 of those prisons located within just one mile.

"A lot of people, when they think of environment and toxic polluters, they think corporations, and they think that the government is somehow a solution to this problem," Wright says. "The prison ecology issue turns that whole thing on its head because in these cases it's the government that's chosen to build these prisons on toxic waste sites or allowed them to become sources of toxic waste. And it is literally holding people at gunpoint at these sites and exposing them."

Former industrial sites "recycled" for prisons

To get to SCI Fayette, where Matthew Morgenstern is incarcerated along with more than 2,000 other men, you may

have to pass through the borough of Brownsville—a small industrial area along the Monongahela River southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This used to be a bustling business center connected to the steel industry, but today downtown Brownsville wears the look of a town that's well past its glory days.

America's rust belt is scattered with places like this, where the retreat of industries in the 1970s left working class folks without opportunities. In many of these places, prisons began to fill in the gap, occupying lands left degraded by industrial activities and offering often-unfulfilled promises of employment to impoverished communities.

The land being "recycled" has, in many cases, already been devastated—to an extent that the construction of a prison may be seen as its only "acceptable" use.

"One of the patterns that we see is where corporations have come in, they pillage the environment, be it by mining, forestry or whatever, and then when everything has been exhausted, when trees have been cut down, every last grain of ore has been ripped from the soil, and everything has been contaminated and poisoned in the process, the final solution is, okay now we're going to build a prison here," Wright says.

SCI Fayette—which is located in the small rural community of LaBelle, about a 12-minute winding drive from Brownsville—is a perfect example of this. The 237-acre men's prison began operating in 2003 on one corner of what, in the 1940s through the 1970s, was one of the largest coal preparation plants in the world, where coal from nearby mines was washed and graded. The "cleaned" coal was then shipped off to power plants and other markets, while the remaining coal refuse was dumped on and around the hilly, 1,357-acre site. By the mid-1990s, when its owners filed for bankruptcy and abandoned the site, an estimated 40 million tons of coal refuse had been

dumped there. At some places the waste piled up some 150 feet.

In 1996, the property was purchased by a local company, Matt Canestrone Contracting (MCC), which entered into a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to dump coal ash—waste produced by burning coal in power plants—on the site as part of a land “reclamation” effort. Since it opened in 1997, more than five million tons of coal ash has been deposited at the dumpsite, which is right across the road from SCI Fayette.

The problem with coal ash is that it’s way more toxic than unburned coal waste as it contains higher concentrations of heavy metals and minerals, including mercury, lead, arsenic, hexavalent chromium, cadmium, boron and thallium. At unlined sites, like LaBelle, contaminants can leach into the local water and fine “fugitive dust” can blow into the air.

Coal ash can cause or contribute to many serious health conditions, including respiratory problems, hypertension, heart problems, brain and nervous system damage, liver damage, stomach and intestinal ulcers, and many forms of cancer, including skin, stomach, lung, urinary tract and kidney. Therefore, many environmental experts say the risks posed by such reclamation efforts outweigh the so-called benefits.

Right when the coal ash dumping started, LaBelle residents began complaining to the DEP that fugitive dust was making them sick. Over the years, they reported suffering from respiratory problems, kidney failure, and several types of cancer. But the DEP did little more than issue fines. It allowed the prison construction to go forward, essentially putting the health of the entire prison population, as well its staff, at risk.

In 2013, Citizens Coal Council, a coal industry watchdog, filed a federal lawsuit against MCC, alleging that the company was responsible for polluting the local air and water due to its failure to curb fugitive dust. The suit noted that 50 families lived in LaBelle, but made no mention of the prisoners at SCI Fayette.

However, prisoners and staff at SCI Fayette have been experiencing health issues that are similar to those reported

Since the 1970s, the U.S. has seen a 700 percent increase in the number of people imprisoned, a result of the growth in “tough on crime” and “war on drugs” policies, as well as a concerted effort to control and minimize the power of social movements and other forms of resistance from within communities of color

by local community members. In fact, SCI Fayette is also exposed to two other potential sources of pollution: The boiler system for the prison burns coal for its power (and creates additional coal ash waste), and a new coal terminal along the riverbank, right next to the prison, transfers three- to ten-million tons of coal per year from boats to rail.

Word of the prisoners’ plight began filtering out, but it wasn’t until 2013 that it reached the ears of Dustin McDaniel, the director of the

Abolitionist Law Center (ALC), a Pittsburgh-based public-interest law firm that works on cases involving human rights abuses in prisons.

In September 2014, based on a year-long review of prison medical records, interviews with prisoners, former prisoners and residents of LaBelle, ALC along with the Human Rights Coalition, an advocacy group that fights for prisoners’ civil rights, released “No Escape,” a report outlining the health issues people were experiencing in the prison. According to the report, 81 percent of the 75 prisoners who responded to a health survey ALC sent out claimed to suffer from respiratory, throat and sinus conditions; 68 percent experienced gastrointestinal problems; 52 percent reported adverse skin conditions; and 12 percent said they were diagnosed with a thyroid disorder. The report also noted 11 of the 17 prisoners who died at SCI Fayette between 2010 and 2013 had died of cancer.

All of these numbers, McDaniel says, were well above what would be considered normal, though he acknowledges that the health survey was limited in its scope, given the number of respondents. “We don’t have a rock-hard analysis that says ‘yes, that’s the causation’ but there’s certainly a lot of correlation,” he says.

After the ALC report came out, the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) conducted “a comprehensive review” of the conditions at the prison and issued a statement in December 2014 saying it had found “no scientific data to support claims of any unsafe environmental conditions or any related medical issues to exist at SCI Fayette.” It said the prison’s water supply had been tested and it had met all relevant drinking standards. The department’s review, however, doesn’t appear to have included looking into the air quality at the prison.

ALC is currently crunching the numbers on a second, more detailed, health survey that it sent out to all the prisoners at SCI Fayette in 2015 and received 650 responses to. The Center is also pushing the state corrections department to conduct an independent and comprehensive health study of the prisoners, prison staff and community members.

The state corrections department did not respond to repeated requests for interviews. Instead, in an emailed response to a few questions, Press Secretary Amy Worden said that the department last conducted an air quality test, for mold and fly ash, in October 2016 and “the results were within parameters set forth by OSHA and ASHRAE and did not require any action.” The DOC didn’t provide us with a copy of the report or any supporting data, so it’s unclear what that test actually revealed.

Worden also said potable water at the facility is tested for bacteria, and TTHM and HAA5—byproducts of adding chlorine to disinfect water—on a monthly basis, in addition to the testing required of Tri County Joint Municipal Authority, which supplies water to the prison. “We are confident that the water supply at SCI Fayette is safe,” she said.

It’s true that the prison’s drinking water comes from farther upstream, so any contamination issues the water might have can’t be linked to the coal ash dump. However, the Municipal Authority’s own water quality reports, dating back to 2013, show that it has consistently exceeded the EPA’s maximum levels for TTHMs, exposure to which is associated with adverse health effects, including cancer.

In June last year, Citizens Coal Council and MCC entered an interim agreement on the 2013 lawsuit under which the company agreed to a one-year moratorium on disposal of coal ash at the site. The dump is scheduled

to start operating again this July, though given recent market trends, where cheap natural gas is driving power generation away from coal, its long-term future is uncertain.

That prospect is small consolation for prisoners like Morgenstern, who say nothing’s really changed inside SCI Fayette and people are still getting sick at higher rates than in most prisons. “They [still] constantly blow out a lot of grey dust from the [prison] vents, which [causes] a little pain to my sinuses and I’m always having to blow my nose. ...I’d say probably 65 to 75 percent of us here deal with this issue,” he said over the phone in April.

“The changes made [to address valley fever] are about managing risk and trying to avoid lawsuits, not about fixing the problems of a massively dysfunctional prison system.”

“Honestly, I would like to see this place shut down because I know the environmental conditions here would take at least 50 to 60 years to heal. It’s putting everybody at risk.”

In California, sitting ducks for valley fever

There’s not much by way of scenery around Avenal State Prison in California’s Central Valley. It’s mostly flat farmland, a large solar array, signs warning of high winds and dust, and trucks lumbering down Highway 33 past the octagon of razor-wire fencing surrounding the prison. The occasional crop duster flies overhead, surprisingly close to prison grounds. Inside the fence, the scene is even starker—drab buildings with small slits for win-

dows, dusty open space and sparse, treeless lawns that the prisoners use for soccer games.

At Avenal, as at other Central Valley prisons, incarcerated people are sitting ducks for valley fever, which is endemic to the dry Southwestern U.S. Research indicates that prisoners are much more likely to contract the disease than are members of the general population. In 2011, a particularly bad year, infection rates for the highest risk California state prisons were dozens of times above those in nearby communities, according to Centers for Disease Control data. Although the fungus is poorly understood, researchers suspect that out-of-town prisoners bused to the Central Valley are especially susceptible because they are not native to the region. Locals may develop some kind of immunity that shields them from the worst valley fever symptoms.

In the past decade, more than 3,500 California prisoners have become sick from valley fever and more than 50 have died from it. Though infection rates decreased significantly after 2011, to fewer than 100 cases each in 2014 and 2015, last year saw another spike with 267 prisoners infected.

The jump can likely be tied to weather patterns: Intense rains—which allow the fungus, *coccidioidomycosis* (or “cocci”), to grow—followed by prolonged dry periods seems to lead to higher infection rates. Experts predict infection rates will continue to climb throughout the Southwest due to a combination of drought, climate change and intensive agriculture.

Avenal State Prison, along with the nearby Valley State Prison, has struggled with particularly high valley-fever-infection rates.

In 2013, a federal court order mandated that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation remove African American and Filipino prisoners—who are genetically at a

much higher risk of getting seriously sick from valley fever—from Avenal and Pleasant Valley state prisons. Some 2,600 prisoners were transferred. Then in 2015, the department began offering all California prisoners the option of taking a newly available valley fever immunity test and diverting those who test vulnerable from these two prisons. Prisoners can decline the skin test, but cannot decline to be transferred if they test vulnerable.

However, some prisoners are still getting sick. Todd Love, who is white, declined the skin test because he has family in King County, where Avenal is located, and didn't want to risk transfer if he tested negative for immunity. Love, 51, has spent nearly 25 years in prison, the last two years at Avenal. Last year, along with, by his estimates, at least 30 others, Love came down with the infection.

"It's the closest to death I've ever been," he says, sitting in the shadeless yard at Avenal. Though he is largely recovered, Love says the illness definitely took a toll on him.

The risk of prisoners contracting valley fever extends beyond the Central Valley, as evidenced in the case of Kenneth Hartman, who's incarcerated in Lancaster, California. Hartman eventually recovered from his 2008 infection after spending several weeks "handcuffed to a bed in an outside hospital" on an intravenous antifungal. When that didn't work, and his kidneys almost failed, he was put on different medication, which worked. He now has low kidney function, which he believes is related to his years of taking antifungal drugs.

"Prisons found to be a serious health risk need to be closed," Hartman writes in a letter from prison. "The changes made [to address valley fever] are about managing risk and trying to avoid lawsuits, not about fixing the problems of a massively dysfunctional prison system."

Life-threatening exposure isn't always tied to a particular, site-specific source of pollution. Problems like water contamination or pesticide exposure can occur at prisons regardless of their location on seemingly benign lands.

In other cases, prison conditions can be made worse by climate change.

As in California, 2011 was a deadly year in Texas prisons. That summer, ten prisoners died of heat stroke in state-operated prison units. The deaths are among 22 in-custody hyperthermia deaths that the state has acknowledged in its 108 prisons units. Seventy-nine of

"Most of us try to wet our sheets and the cement floor. We lay in the water, put the sheet over us while blowing the fan under the sheet, to keep the body temps down."

those units still lack air-conditioning in 2017, even as summer temperatures regularly soar beyond 100 degrees.

"The beds and cubicle wall are metal. [During summer] they are hot and can't be laid on or touched, like touching the hood of a car that has sit in the sun on a 130-degree day," Ford writes about the conditions at the Wallace Pack Unit, a Type I geriatric prison incarcerating predominantly elderly and disabled prisoners who require continuous medical care. "Most of us try to wet our sheets and the cement floor. We lay in the water, put the sheet over us while blowing the fan under the sheet, to keep the body temps down."

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice's solution during periods of extreme heat was to tell Pack Unit pris-

oners to simply drink more water, recommending up to two gallons of water a day on extremely hot days. There was just one problem: The water at the Unit contained between two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half times the level of arsenic permitted by the EPA. Arsenic is a carcinogen. The prisoners drank thousands of gallons of the arsenic-tainted water for more than ten years before a federal judge ordered TDCJ to truck in clean water for the prisoners last year. TDCJ installed a modern filtration system in January.

Both Ford and Cole worry about how prolonged exposure to arsenic may have affected their medical conditions. Cole has been diagnosed with severe coronary artery disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol and has had two stent implants. Ford has seven stent implants, high blood pressure, and "serious issues" with his bladder and kidneys that he says are "from the chemicals."

Cole is the lead plaintiff in a class-action lawsuit challenging conditions at the Unit. TDCJ officials are currently appealing the suit's status as class action in federal court.

Our investigation found that violations of drinking-water contamination, including by arsenic and lead, are not isolated to prisons like Wallace Pack, but are present at many prisons, jails and detention centers across the nation. In fact, according to the EPA's enforcement database, federal and state agencies brought 1,149 informal actions and 78 formal actions against regulated prisons, jails and detention centers during the past five years under the Safe Drinking Water Act, more than under any other federal environmental law.

The database, which did not include penalty information for those enforcement actions, gives just a glimpse of the actual extent of environmental violations at prisons: It contains records for just over 1,000 of the country's

estimated 6,000 prisons and jails. The discrepancy, the EPA says, may be attributed to incomplete data entry, as well as the fact that it contains only facilities that have at some point been found in violation of federal environmental laws. It's possible that many more violations simply aren't reported.

Prisons' legacy of water and air pollution

Though many of mass incarceration's most severe environmental health implications affect prisoners most directly, prisons themselves can become a source of pollution for nearby residents and ecosystems.

Take the California Men's Colony state prison (CMC), located about ten miles from the stunning Pacific Ocean coastline in San Luis Obispo. The prison has a legacy of water pollution dating back nearly two decades, and a history of pollution-related penalties going back to at least 2004, when the prison was fined \$600,000 by the regional California water quality control board for spilling 220,000 gallons of raw sewage into nearby Chorro Creek. The creek flows into Morro Bay, a state-designated marine protected estuary. Despite upgrades to the prison's old wastewater treatment plant after the 2004 spill, problems continued: In 2008 state water officials levied another \$40,000 in fines against CMC for spilling another 20,000 gallons of sewage that resulted in the bay being closed for recreational use and fishing for several days. The prison got into hot water again in 2014, when the EPA levied \$373,500 in fines for Clean Water Act violations. And still the pollution persisted: Spills were documented again in 2015 and in January of this year.

The California Men's Colony may be one of the most egregious water polluters, but it is certainly not alone. Prisons from Virginia to Washington State have been cited for violating point source pollution regulations under both state and federal water

laws, as well as for falsifying water pollution reports. For example, Monroe Correctional Complex, the Washington State prison northeast of Seattle where Wright served some time, has been caught in violation on multiple occasions. The prison got caught in 2004 for falsifying water pollution reports to cover up excess fecal coliform levels in water discharged into the Puget Sound. Additionally, records obtained by the Human Rights Defense Center indicate that Monroe spilled or dumped roughly half-a-million gallons of contami-

An analysis of EPA data indicates that 92 informal actions and 51 formal actions were brought against prisons, jails and detention centers across the country under the Clean Air Act during the past five years, though the total fines for these violations amounted to only \$97,048.

nated water between 2008 and 2015, polluting nearby rivers and wetlands.

Over the past five years, federal and state agencies have brought 132 informal actions and 28 formal actions against regulated prisons and jails under the Clean Water Act, resulting in \$556,315 in fines.

Prisons can have a significant impact on local air quality as well. In some cases, this comes from on-site sources, like industrial activities associated with prison labor programs or local power generation. Pennsylvania's Department of Corrections, for instance, came under scrutiny from the EPA in 2010-2011 because coal-fired boilers at four

state prisons were exceeding federal standards for particulate matter, sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxide. All four facilities were required to clean up their act, and the DOC was required to pay a \$300,000 fine.

An analysis of EPA data indicates that 92 informal actions and 51 formal actions were brought against prisons, jails and detention centers across the country under the Clean Air Act during the past five years, though the total fines for these violations amounted to only \$97,048.

Air quality is also an issue in the Central Valley—where 16 of California's 33 state prisons are located, in addition to federal facilities and local jails.

Debbie Reyes, who runs the California Prison Moratorium Project, points to emissions from prison-related traffic, including visitor vehicles and the many diesel trucks bringing in supplies. In parts of the Central Valley, such as San Joaquin Valley, which don't meet state standards for ozone levels and particulate matter, the prison industry is yet one more source of air pollution heaped upon an overburdened community. Reyes also notes that prisons can consume a lot of water. In an arid area like the Central Valley, this can be particularly problematic during droughts for cities like Avenal and Porterville that share water resources with overcrowded prison systems.

EPA guidelines should apply to prisoners, too

Environmental issues at the U.S.'s extensive patchwork of prisons and jails are regulated by a complicated combination of local, state and federal regulatory agencies, such as local water boards and air pollution boards, as well as pesticide, hazardous waste and toxics control agencies. This makes it difficult to grasp the entire extent of the impact prisons have on the environment and on human health in this country.

The only agency with nationwide oversight of these facilities is the EPA. As with other industries, in order to ensure compliance with federal environmental laws, the EPA conducts on-site monitoring of prisons and jails, responds to public tips and complaints, and encourages self-disclosure of violations.

But the Prison Ecology Project argues that the EPA isn't doing nearly enough, especially when it comes to protecting prisoners' health and environmental rights. It points out that under a 1994 executive order signed by President Bill Clinton, all federal agencies are meant to weigh the impacts of their actions on low-income communities and communities of color that have been disproportionately impacted by environmental pollution.

The EPA does have an environmental justice program, but the Prison Ecology Project says the agency does not apply its environmental justice guidelines to prisoners—despite the fact that the majority of U.S. prisoners are from low-income communities and are people of color—at least in part because the population data the agency uses does not take prisoners into account. This omission, it says, has implications for how the EPA conducts prison inspections and prison-related environmental reviews, and permits construction of new prison facilities.

The Prison Ecology Project and Human Rights Defense Center are pushing to change this. Last year, in anticipation of the EPA's development of its EJ 2020 Action Agenda Framework, Human Rights Defense Center submitted a public comment calling on the agency to “ensure that the millions of prisoners in this country receive the protections that are intended under” Clinton's environmental justice executive order. More than 130 environmental, social justice and prisoners' rights organizations signed on to the letter.

“There are some basic things that come from prisoners being recognized” in the 2020 Action Agenda, says Prison Ecology Project cofounder Panagioti Tsolkas. “For starters, environmental permits would have to take the impact on prison populations into account.” Tsolkas says that over the long term, incorporating prisoners into the EPA's environmental justice analysis would help the environmental movement realize that “there are these invisible populations that could consider themselves as part of the environmental movement and strengthen it.”

The EPA did not respond to repeated requests for interviews with staff in its environmental justice and enforcement offices. However, in an emailed statement, the agency said “data limitations still exist regarding the amount of real-time information available on transient, temporarily relocated, and displaced populations,” but that the agency was working within those challenges.

Prisoners' rights and environmental organizations also point to the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP) failure to consider prisoner well-being in decisions about where to site new facilities, particularly during the environmental review process required under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

As McDaniel of the Abolitionist Law Center (ALC) puts it, “Most of the [Environmental] Impact Statement for a prison will be devoted to issues of the local economy and environment external to the prison, such as traffic, commerce, employment, burden on the local healthcare system, or the local utilities system, as well as impact on any wildlife and natural resources. In practice, the physical health and general well-being of prisoners are not taken into consideration through this process.”

For instance, the prison bureau's 2015 Environmental Impact Statement

(EIS) for its proposed prison on a former mountaintop-removal mining site in Letcher County, Kentucky, fails to consider environmental impacts on the estimated 1,200 people who will be held at the new prison, if it is built. Several groups, including Human Rights Defense Center, the ALC and the Center for Biological Diversity, challenged the EIS on these grounds. A revised EIS, released earlier this year, includes some mention of health implications for prisoners, but does not provide the kind of robust discussion sought by advocates. Human Rights Defense Center contends that this revised EIS might be the only example of an environmental review in which the BOP made any mention of prisoner health.

The BOP, too, declined our reporting team an interview and instead sent an emailed statement saying that it does comply with NEPA requirements and considers the “health and environmental impacts on the prison population when conducting environmental assessments.”

The EPA, incidentally, hasn't always taken such a subdued, reactive role on the issue of toxic prisons. In fact, in 2003, the agency summed up the environmental impact of prisons like this:

“Correctional institutions have many environmental matters to consider in order to protect the health of the prisoners, employees, and the community where the prison is located. Some prisons resemble small towns or cities with their attendant industries, population, and infrastructure. Supporting these populations...requires heating and cooling, wastewater treatment, hazardous waste and trash disposal, asbestos management, drinking water supply, pesticide use, vehicle maintenance and power production, to name a few potential environmental hazards. ...The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been inspecting correctional facilities to see how they are faring.

From the inspections, it is clear many prisons have room for improvement.”

This statement originated from the webpage of EPA’s Region 3 office, which covers the mid-Atlantic states—Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland and Washington, DC. For nearly ten years, the regional office ran a “Prisons Initiative” to improve environmental compliance at prisons and jails. Under the initiative, the EPA conducted inspections at 15 prisons throughout the region to assess compliance, in addition to outreach and training work. Several of the prisons inspected were issued fines in excess of \$100,000.

The initiative ended in 2011 as, according to an agency statement, the “EPA felt prisons in the Mid-Atlantic region were able to ensure environmental regulation compliance by themselves.” Information about the initiative, which was available on the EPA website for more than 15 years, was removed in 2015.

Now, as the Trump White House seeks to close the EPA’s Office of Environmental Justice entirely, many protections for marginalized communities look to be on the chopping block. And that means the opportunity to ensure those protections for prisoners may soon be even further out of reach.

The need for a collective shift in mindset

In the absence of any concrete environmental and public health protections, most actions to improve environmental conditions in prisons seem to be taken only when incarcerated people, prison staff, prisoner rights advocates and environmental groups make enough noise, usually in the form of a lawsuit.

At California’s Avenal State Prison, and the Wallace Pack Unit in Texas, relief for prisoners has been primarily

achieved through the courts. Wallace Pack’s prisoners got clean water only after they sued the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. If the Pack plaintiffs’ class-action lawsuit prevails, it could set a major precedent in the state, leading to more such lawsuits and increasing the pressure on officials to air-condition prisons.

As in Texas, it took outside pressure to really get the ball moving on combatting valley fever in California. In 2005, the same year that the cocci fungus began picking up steam in prisons across the state, a federal judge ruled that medical care for state prisoners was so inadequate that it violated the Eighth Amendment’s prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment. The judge appointed a medical receiver to oversee the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s medical care system. But it took a court order in 2013 to get the corrections department to start following the receiver’s 2011 recommendation and start moving “high risk individuals” out of prisons with the highest valley fever infection rates.

Over in Pennsylvania, the SCI Fayette prison guards’ union fought for access to bottled water for staff and won. But the prisoners there still continue to drink tap water. ALC’s McDaniel says the Center’s plans to file a lawsuit on behalf of the prisoners is “stuck in limbo” until it has more empirical evidence linking coal ash to their health issues.

All such advocacy efforts and litigation are time-consuming and expensive, and often bear little fruit. Federal environmental regulations bar many of the types of pollution and contamination happening in prisons, but state and federal agencies seem to have little incentive to enforce these laws with regard to prisoners. As McDaniel says: “With respect to prisons, they assume that nobody cares, and for the most part, that’s what it is.”

Kenneth Hartman points to the broader sentiment that condones threats to the health and lives of people in prison. “The problem is, the intersection of environmental justice and mass incarceration runs right into the teeth of prisoners not being considered worthy of justice,” he writes. “If we complain about dirty water, or poor ventilation systems, or inadequate medical care, there is a collective societal shrug: You should have thought about that before you committed crime.”

Hartman emphasizes that, in order to truly confront the environmental injustices playing out inside prisons, a collective shift in mindset is necessary. He writes, “The only real solution to these problems requires two things that aren’t going to happen any time soon: (1) Serious oversight of the prisons by independent folks with real power to hold officials accountable for outcomes, and (2) our society acknowledging that prisoners are fellow human beings who deserve to be treated with respect and compassion based solely on our humanity.”

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—Truthout, June 1, 2017

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/40756-america-s-toxic-prisons-the-environmental-injustices-of-mass-incarceration>

High Cost of Gadgetry

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW BY LOUIS PROYECT

Two new documentaries will make you look differently at your electronic gadgets, especially the cool iPhone or other products from Apple whose logo might be changed to a skull-and-crossbones after seeing *Death by Design* and *Complicit*. They examine the damage done to both the workers who produce them and the environment, especially in China, as well as raise important questions about the meaning of “progress.” If being able to use an iPhone to pay for your Starbucks coffee comes at the expense of a leukemia epidemic for Foxconn workers and making 60 percent of China’s groundwater unsuitable for drinking, then the whole question of progress has to be thought through.

Death by Design

Death by Design is now available on VOD. Directed by veteran PBS *Frontline* filmmaker Sue Williams, it reviews the environmental impact of computers and other products that fall within the rubric of the Information Age.

When you think of the impact of toxic waste on drinking water, the first thing that comes to mind is fracking. After seeing *Death by Design*, you will learn that manufacturing circuit boards, a process we associate with workers in white suits operating in sterile, laboratory-like environments, is just as much of a threat to our health. Although 90 percent of manufacturing takes place in far-off China nowadays, it arose first in IBM’s upstate New York headquarters and then Silicon Valley. This is where high-technology cancer clusters and other serious illnesses first cropped up.

Endicott, N.Y. was the birthplace of IBM. For most of the time when mainframes were being built there, the corporation used to dump industrial solvents used for cleaning hardware into local drains. The solvents seeped from leaky pipes into the ground with disas-

trous consequences for people living above. As happens so frequently with cancer clusters, the corporation denies responsibility since finding a smoking gun is almost impossible given medical science’s inability now and in the future to determine the exact sequence of events that lead to a mutant cell. IBM eventually took responsibility for the cleanup and compensation to the victims but only after the damage had already been done.

Endicott was a blue-collar town that became impoverished after IBM moved production to Armonk. Is there any place we’d associate less with blue collars than Silicon Valley? *Death by Design* reveals that the men and women who live in \$2 million homes were not spared either. Until it became the software capital of the USA, Silicon Valley produced hardware just like Endicott and with the same disastrous results. In the 1980s, most desktop computers were being produced there except for Dell. Like IBM in Endicott, the manufacturers left behind a gigantic plume of carcinogenic chemicals. And just like in Endicott, IBM brought along its bad profit-maximizing habits to San Jose where Big Blue and Fairchild Electronics constituted the largest companies in the area. They built storage tanks for their waste products but as tends to happen with powerful solvents, they broke through the walls of the containers and leaked into the groundwater. In Silicon Valley, residents blamed the giants for an epidemic of birth defects but as is the case with cancer, determining an exact cause-and-effect is difficult to prove especially when you are dealing with companies that have a battery of high-powered lawyers with Harvard degrees.

Marxist economist David Harvey was responsible for a major theoretical breakthrough that helps us understand

how capitalism has such a knack for survival. When contradictions begin to mount in a country like the USA, where people feel entitled to clean air and water, the system can displace its ills geographically especially to places like China that has turned into the toxic waste capital of the world.

Death by Design introduces us to a nation that has made a devil’s bargain with its population. In exchange for a rising standard of living, it asks its wage slaves to endure the same carcinogens that the people of Endicott and Silicon Valley would not put up with. But unlike the American toxic sites, the Chinese suffer double jeopardy. Not only do they have to put up with solvents leeching into their rivers and lakes, they suffer deadly air pollution that is the result of the unregulated elimination of the smart phones, tablets and laptops that you replace so frequently as the consequence of planned obsolescence. Apple is particularly cagey about the way it forces “great” new versions of the iPhone on you. It uses non-standard screws on the casing so unless you have a special screwdriver, you are practically forced to buy a new model, which Apple deviously designed to have a life-span about the same as the battery.

China is now the “e-waste” capital of the world. While some of the discarded electronics sent to China is recycled, much of it goes up in smoke. Since this is China, there are no regulations about incineration procedures. The film shows men and women tossing circuit boards into a bonfire without any regard to what the ashes might do to them or people living nearby—or for that matter the rest of the planet Earth. Since the metals, including lead, that go into an electronic device cannot be destroyed (they are elements, after all), all you can do is transform them

into tiny air-borne particulates that can not only seep into China's waters but ascend into the sky and travel across the Pacific floating in a cloud. The film shows a California biologist in a plane filled with electronic instruments that can determine the make-up of a cumulus cloud. She tells us that the clouds amount to fluffy, picturesque bundles of carcinogens.

To some extent, my interest in cancer has much to do with working as a database administrator at Memorial Sloan-Kettering in the mid-1980s. Seeing five-year-old kids walking around with a chemotherapy bottle attached to their arm really has a way of concentrating your mind. In the half-dozen or so books I have read about the science of cancer over the years, I was left with the conclusion that making a direct connection between the environment and the disease is not easy. That is why, for example, it took over a decade for the court case against IBM in Endicott to be decided in favor of the victims.

However, it is much easier to connect the dots when it comes to on-the-job casualties. The most obvious cases are the young chimney sweeps in London who came down with testicular cancer in the Victorian era or the mostly women workers who got cancer after applying radium to luminous watch dials in the early 20th century.

It is also an open-and-shut case when it comes to the Chinese workers at Foxconn and other subcontractors to Apple who came down with leukemia after using solvents such as benzene and n-hexane to clean the glass covers of iPhones.

Complicit

Complicit, which will be seen as part of the annual Human Rights Festival in New York¹, is focused on these victims who after contracting leukemia decided to become activists determined to make Foxconn, Apple and other multinationals pay for their abuses and

change the way they produce the consumer goods that are so seductive to consumers worldwide. Since wages constitute about one percent of an iPhone's cost, you'd think that this would be no big deal—that is until you run into someone like Terry Gou, the CEO of Foxconn.

With ample support from the ruling Communist Party, Gou denounces protesters gathered in front of his plant, including those who have been enduring lengthy stays in the hospital for leukemia treatments, relying on the cops to spirit away the riffraff.

Most of the workers who end up working at Foxconn and other high-technology subcontractors are migrant workers from China's impoverished farmlands. While they were willing to work at a breakneck pace up to seven days a week for minimal wages (to the point that some were driven to suicide,) they had not bargained on coming down with leukemia when they were only in their early 20s.

Benzene had long ago been banned in American factories but that did not get in Terry Gou's way. To make a case against him, labor activists began to subpoena medical records from the plant, photograph chemical storage in the plants, and use picket lines to put pressure on the company.

The labor activists profiled in *Complicit* had no idea what risks they were taking when they were trained to use an unnamed solvent to clean a product. Long Li, the 18-year-old daughter of peasant farmers from Guizhou who was disfigured from a kerosene lamp accident when very young, was excited when she first came to Guangdong province, where most of China's electronic goods are made. The tall buildings, the sense of independence, and the money she earned at work that could help keep her parents fed and clothed, made her feel elated.

She was told by her boss to dip her rubber-gloved right index finger into a

solvent and then rub each cell phone screen for ten to 20 seconds on the assembly line. She was issued a paper mask, but rarely used it because they were too hot. Long worked from 8:00 A.M. until 11:00 P.M., and as late as 4:00 A.M. in the busy season. Unlike those exposed to benzene, Long Li worked with n-hexane that produced neurological damage rather than leukemia. While it might not have killed her, it disabled her and made it impossible for her to continue working to help out her parents.

At some point, she became an activist working with Yi Yeting, a former Foxconn employee who despite being ill with leukemia devoted every hour to exposing China's cruel, profit-driven manufacturers. Yi was 24 when he went to work for Foxconn and like Long Li came from a poverty-stricken rural village. Despite the tendency of leukemia to rob people of their energy, Yi became a tireless defender of workers' rights.

All of the subjects in *Complicit* and their families are the people who the Chinese revolution was made for. Like the peasants who sacrificed their lives fighting to liberate China from the KMT [Kuomintang, the Nationalist Party of China]² and the landlords they served, they are now on the front lines of a new battle to transform China into the world's leading capitalist power.

For some on the left, the emergence of the BRICS and China's ability to confront Western hegemony has been viewed as a major anti-imperialist advance. Furthermore, Xi Jinping has received accolades for supposedly returning to Maoist principles. For example, Workers World Party leader Fred Goldstein wrote an article titled "Behind Xi Jinping's call for a return to Marxism" that took note of a trip Xi made to Guangdong Province not long after becoming the head of state. There he spoke to fellow Communists about the dangers of a Gorbachev-type development in China. Goldstein reported that "He spoke in dire terms about

how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was overthrown and socialism completely destroyed. The long-term fate of the party is undoubtedly a deep concern of Xi and his collaborators.”

Xi’s visit to Guangdong province is highly symbolic. This is the center of Chinese manufacturing that took off after Deng Xiaoping’s “liberalization” of the Chinese economy. For Goldstein and others who think like him, China has a dual character. It is both capitalist and socialist, perhaps bearing similarities to the NEP [New Economic Policy]³ in the Soviet Union. Wasn’t it possible that the opening up of Guangdong to foreign investment was necessary for China to accumulate the capital that would allow for domestic development? But Goldstein worries that unlike the Soviet Union, China has gone far too long putting up with a capitalist sector. He doubts that Xi is capable of resolving the contradiction in favor of socialism but at least credits him with putting the brakes on the worst elements of the capitalist sector who are likely the sort that allowed benzene and n-hexane to be used in their factories—at least one hopes so.

There is an assumption underlying the thinking of people like Fred Goldstein that must be addressed. Is socialism only about providing the necessities of life? Under Mao Zedong, there was an “iron rice bowl” that referred to a guaranteed lifetime job and benefits. Much of that has been whittled away during the post-Mao

period but it is still worth asking if that was what Karl Marx had in mind when he wrote about the need for socialism.

When I began working as a programmer at Met Life in 1968, they used to call the insurance company “Ma Met.” Like “Ma Bell,” it was a place that provided lifetime job security and great benefits. Lunch was free and the health plan would not be regarded as a “Cadillac” plan today. It would be seen as a “Rolls Royce” plan.

My first manager once told me that as long as I didn’t keep a bottle of whiskey in my desk, I’d never have to worry about losing my job. Indeed, after the FBI sent an anonymous postcard to my workplace naming me as a commie, the top boss of my division called me into his office to tell me that if I ever got such a postcard in the future, he’d make sure that the person who sent it would be fired. If he only knew that J. Edgar Hoover authorized the postcard as part of Cointelpro, he might not have made such a promise since Hoover’s job security was even greater than mine.

Was this socialism? This is not such a far-fetched question since so much of the left today believes that electing Bernie Sanders would have moved us closer to “socialism,” which really boiled down to turning back the clock to the 1950s when American industry was still operating within a New Deal context.

I have a rather old-fashioned, if not quaint, idea of what socialism amounts to. It is a system that not only abolishes

private property; it also prevents bureaucrats from exercising power over our daily lives. Unless you have the right to speak your mind and fight for your beliefs without fear of being sent to jail like the worker-activists suffering

from leukemia in China, then find some other word to describe the system.

Despite being accused of having helped to turn Marxism into a secular religion, I continue to regard Frederick Engels as second to none—including Marx—in articulating the total freedom possible under a classless society. For Engels, the provision of food, housing and medical care is not the same thing as socialism. Instead, as he pointed out in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, it is the total transformation of society that will allow us to enjoy true freedom for the first time in human history:

“The socialized appropriation of the means of production does away, not only with the present artificial restrictions upon production, but also with the positive waste and devastation of productive forces and products that are at the present time the inevitable concomitants of production, and that reach their height in the crises. Further, it sets free for the community at large a mass of means of production and of products, by doing away with the senseless extravagance of the ruling classes of today, and their political representatives. The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this possibility is now, for the first time, here, but *it is here.*”

Louis Proyect blogs at <http://louisproyect.org> and is the moderator of the *Marxism mailing list*. He reviews films for CounterPunch.

—CounterPunch, June 2, 2017

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/02/the-high-cost-of-gadgets/>

1 <https://ff.hrw.org/film/complicit?city=New%20York>

2 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuomintang>

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Economic_Policy



Mumia's Legal Challenge

District Attorney covers up judicial bias

BY RACHEL WOLKENSTEIN

On April 28, 2017 Mumia Abu-Jamal had a promising win in his new legal action to reverse all the Pennsylvania state appeal decisions from 1998-2008 that upheld his murder conviction. Philadelphia Judge Tucker, supervising judge of the Court of Common Pleas, denied the District Attorney's "Motion to Dismiss" Mumia's petition. Judge Tucker also ordered the District Attorney's Office to disclose all files and information that support Mumia's claims that his state appeal process was corrupted because Philadelphia District Attorney Ronald Castille was involved in prosecuting Mumia's appeals of his conviction and death sentence, and then sat in judgment as an elected Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice and refused to recuse (remove) himself during Mumia's post-conviction appeals. These appeals challenged the constitutional violations that Castille had defended as District Attorney.

Mumia's new petition is based on the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Williams v. Pennsylvania*. That decision held that a judge who had previously been personally involved in a critical prosecutorial decision in that case has a conflict of interest. Such a conflict violates due process if the judge does not recuse himself from the appeal deliberations. In the Williams case, the former DA, then judge, was the very same Ronald Castille.

In addition to Mumia, thirteen other men whose death sentences were authorized or defended by DA Castille brought legal actions to reverse and reinstate their appeal rights. Because of information about Castille's involvement already known to the court in five

of those cases, new appeal rights were granted. In the other cases, like Mumia's, the District Attorney was ordered to search the DA office files for information about Castille's involvement in those cases (referred to as "discovery.")

A legal victory in Mumia's new petition reinstates his appeal rights to assert his innocence and appeal the wholesale denial of his due process rights to a fair trial.

It was anticipated that the District Attorney's Office (DAO) would not comply with the order to provide the documentation that Ronald Castille, as District Attorney, had significant personal involvement in Mumia's case. It was anticipated that the DA's office would continue the cover-up of the judicial and prosecutorial misconduct that permeates the frame-up conviction of Mumia.

Thirty days after the judge's order to produce the DAO files on Castille, some 50 pages that carried Castille's name as the District Attorney were released. These were pages from the public record; there were no internal memos or information about Castille's involvement in the constitutionally significant issues in Mumia's appeal, including racial discrimination in jury selection, the integrity of the jury deliberation and responsibility for the verdict, and the violation of First Amendment rights by injecting Mumia's membership and advocacy as a Black Panther Party member as motive for murder.

The DAO's May 30, 2017 response was non-compliant, obstructionist and a blatant cover-up. They said: "the Commonwealth has reviewed its files for this case in search of documents or

records 'showing former District Attorney Ronald Castille's personal involvement in the [case of Mumia Abu-Jamal].' The Commonwealth has found no such documents or records in the materials reviewed."

Mumia's lawyers, Christina Swarns of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Judith Ritter, sent a letter to Judge Tucker on June 13, 2017 asking him to order "complete compliance" by the DAO, including a list and index of the files searched.

On June 22 Judge Tucker ordered the DA to examine more records, produce indexes proving that they searched, and an order to turn over all documents that might show Ron Castille and PA Supreme Court judges' direct involvement in Mumia's criminal case. The battle has begun.

This latest development underscores the decades long frame-up of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the continued commitment by the police, prosecution and judiciary to keep Mumia imprisoned for life—on slow death row. There is a path to Mumia's freedom in winning this legal action. But winning in the capitalist racist courts will take nothing less than an international campaign and mobilization demanding, Free Mumia, Now!



The Second Death of Philando

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Philando Castile
1983-2016



The video is riveting.

A woman is rapt with rage, her voice slow and controlled, as a cop points his gun at her, as her lover bleeds his life away beside her, and her baby daughter looks on in what can only be called wonder.

Philando Castile is dying as a discussion goes on, but it isn't with him, it's about him.

The cop's gun quivers and quakes, pointed at this woman, as the cop's voice also quivers and quakes, fear thick in every breath.

The cop, Jeronimo Yanez, has just killed Philando, and he attempts to explain why. "He was moving" he said, "He was reaching for a gun."

Castile was reaching, his girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds said, for his wallet,

which held his driver's license and gun permit.

Why were they stopped? Yanez said a broken taillight.

Just hours ago, a jury relieved Yanez of his anxiety by finding him not guilty of manslaughter!

A jury believed Yanez's tale that the Black man was a robbery suspect.

The jury believed, once again, that a Black life had no intrinsic value, and that it could be treated like trash, burned up and discarded, like an old pair of shoes.

Philando Castile's name joins a list as long as life, sacrificed on the altar of white fear.

—Prison Radio, June 16, 2017

Phil Africa: MOVE Member

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Early in the year of 1956, a brown baby boy was born, and named William Phillips. Who knew he would grow up into a man known widely as Phil Africa?

For those who knew him, he was Phil Africa, a revolutionary member of the MOVE Organization and its Minister of Defense.

For those who knew him, they could never forget his broad, broke-tooth smile, that sparkle in his eyes, his raspy voice, or the joy that he took in life.

With his broad chest, and thick, muscled arms, he radiated strength and confidence. He had a gift for gab, and took easily to people, helped by a ridiculous sense of humor.

For those who really knew him knew that Phil was—like indigenous

political prisoner Leonard Peltier, like former Black Panther political prisoner Sundiata Acoli, like California's Death Row prisoner Kevin Cooper, and like Kevin Rashid Johnson, now in Texas prisons—a talented artist who painted remarkable works in acrylics.

His friends and family would receive beautiful pieces of art, painted amidst the darkness of prison.

In the '90s, when I saw him while going to court, he said, after our greeting: "Hey Mu—whenever you feel down, just look up, man. There, in the sky, the sun, the winds, the clouds, all of that wonder—that's our Mother, the awesome power of Mama. That's the power that feeds us, that fuels us, that energizes us. That's the power of

nature, of life, and that's in all of us. It's the Power of Life, knowimeen?"

Nothing this system makes is more powerful than that!

Years later, I remember those words as if they were spoken yesterday.

Phil Africa is no longer with us, but then again, he is, for his memory, his presence is fresh.

He died mysteriously at Dallas State prison.

Phil Africa: MOVE member!

—Prison Radio, April 16, 2017

Write to:

Mumia Abu-Jamal AM-8335

SCI-Mahanoy

301 Morea Road

Frackville, PA 17932

My Heartfelt “Thank You!”

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Several days ago I received a message from both of our lawyers, Bob Boyle and Bret Grote, informing me that the latest lab tests came in from the Discovery Requests.

And they told me that the Hepatitis C infection level is at zero and as of today I’m Hepatitis C free.

This is in part due to some fine lawyering by Bret and Bob who—remember—filed the suit while I was in the throes of a diabetic coma, unconscious and thus unable to file for myself.

But it’s also due to you, the people. Brothers and sisters who supported our efforts, who contributed to this fight with money, time, protests and

cramming court rooms on our behalf, who sent cards, who prayed, who loved deeply.

I can’t thank you all individually but if you hear my voice or read my words know that I am thanking you, all of you. And I’m thanking you for showing once again the Power of the People.

This battle ain’t over, for the State’s cruelest gift is my recent diagnosis of cirrhosis of the liver. With your love we shall prevail again. I thank you all. Our noble Doctors, Corey Weinstein, who told us what to look for, and Joseph Harris who gave me my first diagnosis and who became the star of the courtroom by making the mysteries of Hep

C understandable to all. An internist working up in Harlem, Dr. Harris found few thrills better than telling his many Hep C patients that they’re cured.

This struggle ain’t just for me y’all.

Because of your efforts thousands of Pennsylvania prisoners now have hope of healing from the ravages of Hepatitis C. “Let us march on ’til victory is won.” So goes the old Negro Spiritual, “The Black National Anthem.”

We are making it a reality. I love you all.

From Prison Nation,

This is Mumia Abu-Jamal

—*Prison Radio*, May 27, 2017

The Mother Of All Bombs

BY REVEREND EDWARD PINKNEY



News! After serving the minimum sentence, 30 months (two-and-a-half years,) for a crime he never committed,

Reverend Edward Pinkney has been released on parole from Marquette Branch Prison as of Tuesday, June 13!
—*The Editors*

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 by the United States government.

Civilian casualties erode America’s morals. The White House ordered U.S. forces to drop one of its largest conventional weapons, known as the “mother of all bombs,” in Afghanistan. The attack came with a major risk of civilian lives, which means very little to the United States government that spawns new enemies, fuels insurgencies and diminishes American morals.

Already, there are indications of a growing number of civilian deaths resulting from the White House bombing campaign. According to some esti-

mates, over 200 people died during the March 17, 2017 air strike in Mosul, Iraq’s second largest city. It was potentially the largest single loss of innocent lives in the USA led coalition strike since the fight against the Islamic State began in 2014. The United States government is the biggest bully in the whole wide world.

Airwar.org, a non-profit group, says civilian deaths from coalition air strikes in Iraq and Syria rose from 585 in the last quarter of 2016 to 2,580 in the first quarter of 2017.

The Pentagon is careless about taking such risks seriously when it comes to civilians in Syria—the women and children. There is no military in the entire world that has proven less sensitive to civilian casualties.

War is an ugly business. The world is full of war criminals, like the United States, who destroy innocent lives to

advance their ideologies. The United States government's premise is to target anyone who gets in its way, even if that means the targeting of innocent civilians; this means nothing to our government.

Another misdirected air strike by the USA led coalition earlier this week killed 18 civilians in Northern Syria. The central command said that the coalition aircraft were given the wrong coordinates. The United States has no regard for the Syrian people.

This is nothing short of criminal betrayal of international solidarity and provides political cover for the American ruling class. The *New York Times* and other major corporate U.S. news outlets rushed to accuse the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad of being responsible for the scores of people who died from poison gas in Idlib Province, Syria on April 4, 2017.

We have heard this before—remember the weapons of mass destruction! Former President Bush led in these lies about Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. These lies were used to justify the imperialist invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Republicans and Democrats joined in cheerleading President Trump's decision to unleash bombing raids on Syria as a reprisal against Assad. The mother of all bombs, the bomb known officially as a GBU 43B or Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB) weapon unleashes 11 tons of explosives!

We the people must stop this bully who will continue to berate, bully, and bomb countries, including those countries that are incapable of defending themselves. We must confront this bully in our White House at all costs!

—BANCO, May 16, 2017

<http://www.bhbanco.org>

Behind the Walls

What's hidden behind the walls of America's prisons?

BY HEATHER ANN THOMPSON

Few Americans fully appreciate just how many of their fellow citizens are ensnared in the criminal justice system.

Some may have heard that there are about 2.3 million people behind bars, but that figure tells only part of the story. Yes, in a stunning array of 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 901 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails and 76 Indian Country jails, as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers and prisons in the U.S. territories, we physically contain more human beings than any other country in the world. In addition to those actually locked up, there are another 840,000 Americans being supervised on parole and an additional 3.7 million people being monitored on probation.

Consider this: The world's most populous city, Tokyo, and the U.S.'s most populous state, California, have fewer residents combined than the up to 100 million U.S. citizens who now have a criminal record.

As important, these historically unprecedented rates of containment, and the deep stigma of a criminal record, aren't experienced equally in this country. America's incarceration crisis is suffered staggeringly and disproportionately by communities of color.

That so many are blissfully unaware of just how many people are, or have been, subject to containment or control is, perhaps, unsurprising. Prisons are built to be out of sight and are, thus, out of mind. Somehow, even though these institutions contain human beings, including children, and even though we are the ones who cough up the billion of dollars that it costs to run them, we are expected simply to trust that they are operated humanely and that they in fact make our society safer.

As a historian of crime and punishment who has been inside of America's prisons and has documented severe abuses that have taken place within them, I know this trust is not warranted. It is past time that the public has unfettered access to these public institutions so that we can know exactly what happens behind prison walls.

The fight to see inside

There is, in fact, a long history of the public being kept away from prisons so that corrections officials could run them as they wished. For much of the 19th and into the 20th century, state politicians' deeply ingrained fear of federal encroachment on their power more generally translated into the so-called "hands-off doctrine" when it came to how they ran their prisons. Prison authorities, it was understood, had the right to do what they wanted to those in their charge.

Of course prisoners routinely tried to bring attention to the abuses that happened to them. But time and again, and most notably in the infamous 1871 case *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, their bid to be treated as human beings was formally denied. In fact, according to the court in this case, prisoners were "slaves of the state."

In the 1960s and 1970s, though, in response to escalating protests in penal facilities and in cities across the country, prisoners finally gained some rights. In turn, the public began to learn a bit more about what was happening to them behind bars.

It was, for example, deeply significant when the Warren Court opined in a 1974 case, *Wolff v. McDonnell*, that "a prisoner is not wholly stripped of constitutional protections when he is imprisoned for crime. There is no iron

curtain drawn between the Constitution and the prisons of this country.”

However, at the moment that more light was being shone on prison conditions because of specific judicial rulings, it was also clear that serious limitations on the public’s access to these institutions would remain and, overtime, actually increase.

In 1974, the court ruled in *Pell v. Procunier* that prisoners’ First Amendment rights were in fact limited. In this case the court held that journalists, the people who might hear prisoner accounts of abuse and share them with the public, “have no constitutional right of access to prisons or their inmates beyond that afforded to the general public.” As Ted Kennedy noted passionately before his colleagues in the Senate, this decision was alarming since, as he pointed out, “the public cannot regularly tour the prisons and interview inmates.”

Another significant blow to the public’s access came in 1987 when a decision was rendered in the case *Turner v. Safley*. The court ruled that prisoners’ rights to speak to the media existed only to the extent that prison authorities didn’t have a reasonable justification for restricting those rights. And the lid on access lowered even farther in the 2003 case *Overton v. Bazzetta*. The court ruled, in short, that if prison administrators wished to bar visitors to prison, their desires trumped other constitutional considerations such as the First Amendment rights of prisoners.

The court even found that prison officials could prevent visits between prisoners and their kids if the restrictions on visitation were related to “valid interests in maintaining internal security.”

Access abroad

Notably, other prison systems, most famously those in countries such as Sweden and Norway, are much more transparent. The primary goal of pris-

on, officials in these countries maintain, is to return people to the society improved. And, thus, they insist, prisons must have oversight to ensure that they are run humanely.

Not only are Scandinavian prisoners assigned a special officer “who monitors and helps advance progress toward return to the world outside,” but Norwegian prisons boast an “explicit focus on rehabilitating prisoners through education, job training and therapy...[and the] priority of reintegration.”

Even in countries not known for their human rights, such as Singapore, prison officials explicitly connect the humane treatment of the incarcerated to the broader public good. As their corrections officials put it, “by rehabilitating our inmates, society can continue to be safe even when these offenders leave prison.”

The principle that the public has a responsibility to run prisons humanely was in fact adopted by the United Nations back in 1955.

When the U.N. revised and again adopted its “Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” in 2013, thereafter dubbed the “Nelson Mandela Rules,” not only was it endorsing the idea that penal practices must be humane and prisoners treated like people, but it also made clear that humane treatment depended upon outsider access to prisons. According to the U.N., “services and agencies, governmental or otherwise” interested in prisoners’ well being “shall have all necessary access to the institution and to prisoners.”

Why access matters

Even a cursory glance at our nation’s history indicates that such access is not only desirable, but necessary.

The abuses that went on in this country’s 19th-century penal institutions, both in the North and in the South, are well-documented, and it is

now obvious that the 20th century did not bring much improvement.

One need only read of the pain and suffering the men locked up at the Angola Penitentiary in Louisiana endured in the 1950s. Here, men willingly cut their own Achilles tendons so that they might avoid the abuses of the guards driving them in the prison’s cotton fields. Or we can look at the horrific torture endured by the men at Attica in the wake of their 1971 protest.

Throughout American history unspeakable abuse of men and women has been allowed to happen behind prison walls because the public had no access.

And, if we pay close attention to what has been happening much more recently behind bars, it is clear that the closed nature of prisons remains a serious problem in this country.

In September 2016, prisoners at facilities across the country erupted in protests for better conditions. In March and April of 2017, prisons in Delaware and Tennessee similarly exploded.

In each of these rebellions, the public was told little about what had prompted the chaos and even less about what happened to the protesting prisoners once order was restored.

In fact, when we, the public, just dig a little, it is obvious that much trauma takes place behind bars while we aren’t watching.

In a juvenile facility in Florida it is now clear that over the course of many decades in the 20th century, prison officials murdered scores of young boys. In facilities such as Rikers Island, young people today experience physical abuse and some have died in custody. And not just children, but vulnerable adults as well, suffer tremendously, and daily, because they are at the utter mercy of officials who don’t have to answer to the public.

Indeed, it is only when there is a particularly dramatic abuse, or a death

that simply can't be hidden, that the public gets any glimpse of what life on the inside is like for so many Americans.

It wasn't until concern was raised about babies being born with brain damage that we learned that women are shackled during childbirth in our prisons. It wasn't until brave health-care professionals came forward that we learned about the many broken bones and internal injuries prisoners were suffering at the hands of their captors. It wasn't until prisoners ended up dead with marks on their body indicating to outside coroners that they had been tortured that we knew about the traumas that the mentally ill are suffering in prison. And, sadly, it isn't until we hear of cases being filed on behalf of children that we finally learn how many of them have suffered sexual and physical abuse and about how much emotional distress they suffer from being kept in utter isolation.

More recently, until journalist Nell Bernstein managed to get access to our nation's juveniles facilities, the public was blissfully unaware of the alarming fact that "More than a third of youth reported that staff used force unnecessarily, and 30 percent said that staff placed them into solitary confinement as discipline," or that the amount of physical force used on children in these facilities is "staggering."

Here is but one account that Bernstein was able to share with the public of a 12-year-old boy who, when his mother was allowed finally to visit him, was found "rail-thin," with his eyebrows shaved off, a dent in his temple and with a "huge black eye, a busted lip, and a bruise on his rib cage in the shape of a boot." When she asked him, appalled, how he had gotten so injured he explained flatly, "Mom, this is what happens...A guard did this. They want you to know who's boss."

Volatile and dangerous workplaces

It isn't just those who have been sentenced to serve time in prisons who

suffer from the public's lack of access to those institutions. The men and women who work inside of them also pay a high price.

Every American prison is, of course, severely overcrowded and, therefore, they are not just hellholes for the incarcerated, they are also volatile and dangerous workplaces.

Like prisoners, correction officers also end up injured and killed behind

...other prison systems, most famously those in countries such as Sweden and Norway, are much more transparent. The primary goal of prison, officials in these countries maintain, is to return people to the society improved

bars and, also like prisoners, they too experience high rates of suicide as a result of the terrible conditions. And, also as with prisoners, the only way we hear just how terrible things really are for guards is when something particularly awful happens to one of them and protests erupt, as they did in states such as Alabama in 2016.

Barriers to access

When ordinary citizens learn of atrocities committed behind bars, most are appalled, but the sad reality is that the public actually has few legal tools at its disposal to insist on the access it needs to protect guards or prisoners.

Yes, the American public does have some "right to know" what the officials we pay are doing via the 1966 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This piece of legislation was intended to facilitate "the watchdog function of the public over the government" and it was meant to give citizens "the knowledge necessary to evaluate the conduct of government officials." All who supported the passage of FOIA understood that

"access to the government information necessary to ensure that government officials act in the public interest."

When one group tried to get documents from the Bureau of Prisons, for example, it was denied access to files for 14 years and, even then, it took a law suit to settle the matter. As journalist Jessica Pupovac points out, "Restrictive prison policies continue to be an issue—and a problem—for journalists." Of course, for those without press credentials, finding out what is happening behind bars—having any idea what behaviors and actions their tax dollars are making possible in America's vast carceral network—remains virtually impossible.

How then might Americans ever know what actually goes on in the criminal justice system that they fund, the penal institutions that their loved ones populate in ever greater numbers and in the many other apparatuses of containment they are told will keep them safer?

The answer to that question is not at all clear, but the imperative of continuing to loudly demand public access to our public penal institutions is. Access is a responsibility even if it has yet to be a guaranteed right.

As history and present-day headlines make clear, the public must know what happens in prisons. Not knowing is what makes it possible for unimaginable suffering to take place in the name of safety and security. There is no reason for us to make this Faustian bargain, and countless, human, reasons why we must not.

Heather Ann Thompson is Professor of History and Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan. She is the author of several books including Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Rebellion of 1971 and its Legacy.

—*Black Agenda Report*, June 13, 2017

https://www.blackagendareport.com/secretive_us_prisons

Toxic Prisons

Speech for the Fight Toxic Prisons 2017 National Convergence Conference

BY BRYANT ARROYO

Hello there environmentalists, ecologists, bioneers, blue-gold/rain forest protectors, movers/shakers, GMO opponents, Green Tech innovators, Indigenous leaders, social/environmental justice activists gathered here today.

I want to thank you for your unanimous invitation to join all of the “environmental regulators,” at this unprecedented “Fight Toxic Prisons 2017 National Convergence Conference,” at Denton/Ft. Worth, Texas.

The environment includes everything around an individual, the air one breathes, the water we drink, and the place in which we live. As such, the environment serves as a protective factor and promotes one’s overall physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

So much have the various features of the Earth been shown to be in delicate balance—such as the physical and chemical properties of water, plant life, the ecosystem, the complexity of the atmosphere—that British astronomer, Sir Fred Hoyle, was moved to state “... [r]ather than accept the fantastically small probability of life having arisen through the blind forces of nature, it seemed better to suppose that the origin of life was a deliberate intellectual act.”

This is why we are here to deliberately fight toxic prisons together in support of those inside the Nation of Prisoners.

I believe it is important that the voices of all who are directly or indirectly impacted by the building of this massive \$444-million-dollar project be heard.

I’d like to start off by quoting the words of Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

Many states have already learned a painful lesson from their dealing with

projects such as the one being proposed by the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) plan to build their facility on a toxic coal mine site in Letcher County. And this is because in everyone of those cases the tragic consequences of allowing similar projects to operate in those other communities could not have been fully appreciated until it was too late to stop the devastation to both human lives and the environment. Indeed, too often, the problem is that the people in those communities are unaware that these companies have a specific set of criteria for targeting their next victim community. That is, communities with high unemployment rates where people are in financial trouble. And once those factors are in play, they’ve got what they need to get their foot in the door. Sadly, even when some might feel apprehensive about the potentially bad consequences of having these projects in their communities, those real concerns compete with the fear of an uncertain financial future for themselves and their families. This is when the seduction dance begins on the part of these giant corporations (BOP).

First, they come into the community offering a bright future for those who would support their BOP plans by promises of good paying jobs. Then, to do away with any real concerns about their personal health and environmental, toxic-site damage, they bring in their so-called experts in their expensive suits with an air of respectability, pretending to be pillars of society, when they are nothing more than hired-guns who come into an unsuspecting community speaking the latest impressive-sounding scientific jargon. With the skill of a master-illusionist, they complete the deception started by company executives. The tragic success

of this deceit is reflected in the readiness with which average tax-paying citizens unwittingly welcome these corporate environmental-terrorists into their communities, only to regret it later when their tax-paying citizens’ lives are devastated by an unlivable environment and their bodies are ravished by terminal diseases.

One of the strongest examples we have that this project is being proposed without any thought of the consequences to environmental justice, water quality, prisoner’s rights, endangered species, and the lack of assessing alternatives to incarceration, can be found in the environmental impact statement (EIS). That’s where the Bureau of Prisons states they have “determined there is no significant new information relevant to environmental concerns and appreciable changes to potential impact as a result of modifications to the Roxana site[.]”

It is very clear from that portion of the statement that the BOP has no idea as to what detrimental impact the building of this federal facility on top of a toxic mine site, costing taxpayers \$444 million dollars out of the federal budget, will have on both human life or on the environment for that matter. In light of this revelation, we have to ask, can anyone see the insanity in this? In effect, the BOP doesn’t mind experimenting to gather data in which close to several thousand federal prisoners, federal corrections officers, civilian staff and the rest of the population of the Roxana-site community will be reduced to the status of guinea pigs; in effect—lab rats.

In closing, there are two reasons for doing anything: a good reason, then, there is, the real reason. Is there any economic feasibility to waste the tax-

STOP TOXIC MINING

payer's \$444 million dollars on a federal prison that will eventually promote sickness and cancer, causing diseases to both the federal prisoners and civilian staff-members, alike?

Fight the Bureau Of Prisons and prevent them from building on a toxic mine site in Roxana. Mutual allegiance is our support system. That is our contract. Protest—fight, fight, fight!

Bryant Arroyo @ Copyright, June 3, 2017

—Prison Radio, June 3, 2017

Write to:

Bryant Arroyo #CU-1126
SCI Frackville
1111 Altamont Blvd.
Frackville, PA 17931



Solidarity Statement from the California Coalition for Women Prisoners In Support of Immigrant Prisoners

Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) sent the solidarity statement below expressing support with the hunger strikers at the Northwest County Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma Washington, one of the largest immigration prisons in the country. People at NWDC, including many women, undertook the hunger strike starting at the beginning of April 2017 to protest the horrendous conditions they are facing. Although the peak of the hunger strike was a few weeks ago, the strikers set a courageous example of resistance for people in detention centers and prisons around the country.

California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP) stands in solidarity with the hunger strikers, many of them women, detained by ICE at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC), a private prison operated by the GEO group contracted by ICE in Washington state. We applaud the detainees at NORCOR, a county jail in rural Oregon, who recently won their demands after sustaining six days without meals.

Since April 10th, those detained in NWDC have refused meals to demand changes to the abhorrent conditions of their detention, including poor quality food, insufficient medical care, little to no access to family visits, legal counsel or legal documents, and lack of timely court proceedings. Hunger strikes are a powerful method of resistance within prisons that require commitment and courage from prisoners and their families. We have seen this historically in California when tens-of-thousands of prisoners refused meals to protest solitary confinement in 2011 and 2013, and also currently in Palestine where over 1,500 prisoners are on hunger

strike against the brutal conditions of Israeli prisons.

As the Trump administration continues to escalate its attacks on Latinx/Chicanx and Arab/Muslim communities, deportations and detentions serve as strategies to control, remove, and erase people—a violence made possible in a context of inflamed xenophobia and increasingly visible and virulent racism. We stand with the families of those detained as well as organizations and collectives on the ground in Washington State struggling to expose the situation inside these facilities as well as confront the escalating strategies of the Trump administration.

CCWP recognizes the common struggle for basic human dignity and against unconstitutional cruel and inhumane treatment that people of color and immigrants face in detention centers, jails, and prisons across the United States. We also sadly recognize from our work with people in women's prisons the retaliatory tactics such as prison transfers and solitary confinement that those who fight oppression face. Similar abuses continue to occur across California at all of its prisons and detention centers, including the GEO-run women's prison in McFarland, California. CCWP sends love and solidarity to the hunger strikers in the Northwest. Together we can break down the walls that tear our families and communities apart. ¡ya basta!

News mailing list: News@womenprisoners.org

http://womenprisoners.org/mailman/listinfo/news_womenprisoners.org

California Coalition for Women Prisoners
1540 Market Street, Suite 490
San Francisco, CA 94102

Old Folsom Prison Hunger Strike

INTERVIEW WITH RAQUEL ESTRADA BY ANN GARRISON

May 27, 2017—On Thursday, prisoners in solitary at California’s Old Folsom State Prison went on hunger strike for their Eighth Amendment right to be protected from cruel and unusual punishment. Raquel is the wife of Anthony Estrada.

Raquel Estrada: They’re being denied adequate access to courts and legal assistance. They’re being denied meaningful education, like self-help courses and rehabilitative programs.

They’re being denied TVs. They’re saying that they don’t have any power outlets, which they do, but they just had them covered. So they’re only allowed to have a crank radio. And at the end of—I think about 30 days—the prison then will take away those crank radios. And if you don’t have a loved one or anyone to buy a crank radio for you, you don’t have anything. Pretty much you’re left in your cell with nothing.

They don’t have exercise equipment. They don’t have any pull-up bars out in the cages or anything. You just stand around—and the cages are pretty small.

The commissary—they take out all the packaging. The food gets stale. It has to be thrown out if you don’t eat your food right away.

The administration’s trying to tell them they can’t give them shorts or sweats because they might use that drawstring on the waistband to commit suicide.

Ann Garrison: In 2013, over 30,000 California prisoners went on strike to protest the same conditions, and lawyers for the prisoners filed a complaint alleging cruel and unusual punishment. That suit was settled in 2016 and a judge ordered the California Department of Corrections to make reforms, which the Center for

Constitutional Rights summarized in six points online. If I understand what your husband wrote in the *Bay View*, he’s saying that Old Folsom State Prison is willfully ignoring court orders and failing to make these reforms. Is that correct?

Raquel Estrada: Yes. No one, when they were doing that lawsuit, thought about adding the ASUs (Administrative Segregation Units) into that lawsuit. So that’s why Folsom refuses to do anything.

Ann Garrison: Is that actually a legal exclusion because the lawsuit regarded something called “Segregated Housing Units (SHUS)?”

Raquel Estrada: Right, but the difference is, when you’re in the SHU, you stay there for years at a time, whereas in ASUs, it’s supposed to be short-term housing. So they’re saying they don’t have to give them the property, the TVs or the hygiene stuff or anything because you’re gonna be leaving within three months top.

But that’s not what’s happening there. There’ve been prisoners there for over a year, who are actually doing SHU terms in there. They (prison authorities) just don’t want to say that, but they’ve been there way past three months.

Ann Garrison: The claim has not been made that that lawsuit—*Ashker v. Brown*—applied in this situation?

R a q u e l Estrada: It was supposed to apply because they’re being held there long term. It’s just

Folsom is claiming that they’re only there for three months and under while they’re being placed in other prisons, but they’re there. And they’re saying they’re not starting their SHU terms, but they are.

Ann Garrison: How long has your husband been in “ad seg?”

Raquel Estrada: He’s been there since January 10 of this year, and he will be there until April of next year.

Ann Garrison: And that was Raquel Estrada, wife of Anthony Estrada, one of the prisoners who have gone on hunger strike at Old Folsom State Prison. Anthony Estrada’s statement can be read on the website of the San Francisco Bay View, sfbayview.com.

In Berkeley, for Pacifica, *KPFA Radio*, I’m Ann Garrison.

Update

The *Bay View* received this update from Raquel Estrada, wife of Old Folsom prisoner and hunger striker Joseph Estrada:

“Hello, Good Morning,

“I showed up at Old Folsom State Prison to see my husband



today—Sunday, May 28—but the prison authorities pulled me aside and told me that the visiting sergeant, Sergeant Valencia, wanted to speak with me. He told me that my husband was no longer there, that he was transferred to the state prison in Tracy. And that’s all he would tell me. The online inmate locator still says he’s at Old Folsom.

“Another Old Folsom inmate called me yesterday on my husband’s behalf around 6:00 P.M. He told me the warden wanted my husband out of Old Folsom and wanted our visits suspended.

“All of this seemed fishy. I didn’t believe they transferred him out, because they rarely transfer inmates on weekends, much less holiday weekends. However, I drove on to the state prison in Tracy, where authorities confirmed that he is there, once again in “ad seg” which is really solitary confinement without any of the humane reforms won in *Ashker v. Brown*.

Editor’s note: Raquel has heard from another prisoner at Folsom that the strike is continuing.

Oakland writer Ann Garrison writes for the San Francisco Bay View, Black Agenda Report, Black Star News, Counterpunch and her own website, AnnGarrison.com, and produces for AfrobeatRadio on WBAI-NYC, KPFA Evening News, KPFA Flashpoints and for her own YouTube Channel, AnnieGetYourGang

—San Francisco Bay View, May 27, 2017

<http://sfbayview.com/2017/05/old-folsom-prisoners-hunger-strike-for-their-8th-amendment-right-freedom-from-cruel-and-unusual-punishment/>

Chelsea Manning is Free, and Her Impact is Worldwide

INTERVIEW BY AARON MATE

U.S. Army whistleblower Chelsea Manning is free after serving seven years behind bars. Kevin Gosztola of Shadowproof and Nathan Fuller of the Courage Campaign, have remained deeply involved in her case, discuss Manning’s freedom and her global impact.

Aaron Mate: It’s the *Real News*. I’m Aaron Mate. Chelsea Manning is free. The Army whistleblower marked her release from a Kansas military prison with a tweet reading, “First steps of freedom.” Manning was behind one of the most important leaks of government information in history. Her release of more than half a million files to Wikileaks exposed stunning revelations on U.S. foreign policy. She was sentenced to 35 years in prison, but President Obama commuted her sentence in January. She served seven years behind bars, the longest ever for a U.S. whistleblower. During her imprisonment, she announced her identity as a female and fought to receive hormone treatment from the military.

Her prison conditions led the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture to accuse the U.S. government of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. I’m joined now by two guests who closely followed Chelsea Manning’s case

and were among the small group of people who attended her 2013 trial. Kevin Gosztola is managing editor of shadowproof.com and co-host of the podcast Unauthorized Disclosure. We’re also joined by Nathan Fuller. He is with the Courage Campaign, which is now raising funds for Chelsea Manning’s legal appeal seeking to have her sentence not just commuted, but overturned. Gentlemen, welcome.

Nathan Fuller: Thank you.

Aaron Mate: Nathan, I’ll start with you because you’ve been a big part of the grassroots effort to win Chelsea’s freedom. A campaign that’s been sustained for a very long time. What’s your reaction to seeing her walk free today?

Nathan Fuller: I really, for a long time, thought this day would never come. I spent several years of my life advocating for Chelsea’s freedom, and I’m just incredibly grateful and just overjoyed that it’s actually here. I’ve been calling for the U.S. to free Chelsea



Manning for a long time, and it's now an adjective, not a verb.

Aaron Mate: Kevin, you covered this trial. Were among the few journalists who actually did that, which was surprising given the amount of attention that the *WikiLeaks* disclosures that Chelsea's release got. Did you ever think that this day would come?

Kevin Gosztola: I thought this day would come. I believed it would come five or even ten years from now. I knew that she would be eligible for parole at some point, but I never would have imagined that a president, and specifically I guess President Barack Obama, would commute her sentence. I believe that's a testament to the power of this movement, this grassroots movement, which Nathan was involved in and others were involved in. It's also probably a testament to some of the independent media out there that was giving attention to her case, and some of the human rights campaigners that were able to make this possible. She's eating hot, greasy pizza and she's happy. It's an incredible moment.

Aaron Mate: Yeah. You're referring to her second tweet upon her freedom, which was her showing the piece of pizza that she was eating. Kevin, you mentioned the media. Let's talk about that for a second, and the climate that Chelsea Manning faced during this time in prison. She was not treated as a hero by the U.S. political and media establishment. Can you break that down for us?

Kevin Gosztola: Yeah. Far from it. Usually there was this dichotomy of, is she a hero? Is she a traitor? Which really told people in this country nothing about what she did. The media largely ignored the substance of her releases and preferred to either talk about her problems with gender or mental health issues, preferred to look at character defects, or just ignore her entirely and just focus upon the character of Julian Assange, or the way in which *WikiLeaks* went about doing its

journalism. Instead of recognizing that she provided a great deal of information that contributed to the public knowledge. It's very difficult I think for the duration of the trial to get any kind of a sympathetic or reasonable detailed look at what was unfolding beyond, is she guilty or is she not guilty? Is she going to be in jail for her life, or is she going to have a shorter sentence?

Aaron Mate: Let's talk for a moment about some of that information that she released. We can't go through it all because it was so extensive. Among the earliest disclosures that Chelsea Manning made, and the one that got among the most attention was this video *Collateral Murder*, showing a U.S. military helicopter. Footage from that helicopter firing on and killing Iraqi civilians, including two employees of the *Reuters* news agency. Let's go to a clip of that.

Speaker 4: Light them all up.

Speaker 5: 002 traffic 260.

Male: Come on. Fire.

Speaker 4: Roger. Keep shooting. Keep shooting. Keep shooting.

Male: Bushmaster 26 bushmaster 26. We need to move, time now.

Speaker 4: All right. We just engaged all eight.

Aaron Mate: That's just a brief clip from *Collateral Murder* released in April 2010, if I remember correctly. Nathan, can you give us the context for that video? Chelsea was serving in Iraq at the time when she came across this.

Nathan Fuller: Right. She was an intelligence analyst, so she was viewing videos and documents, archiving the daily reports of activities in Iraq and Afghanistan and the conflicts there. This is one of many things that she came across that disturbed her, that she felt revealed the inhumanity of some U.S. soldiers and U.S. policy, and something that she thought if the U.S. people saw what was being done in their name, they would object to,

would at least want to have this information public. She felt like this was being kept from the American people, and the only way to change that was to make it public.

Aaron Mate: Kevin, as a journalist, can you briefly talk about just the impact that Chelsea Manning's disclosures, there's more than half-a-million files that she released, had on our understanding of how U.S. foreign policy works?

Kevin Gosztola: I can address that from a personal standpoint. I developed into the journalist that I am today because there was this information that was available, which I was able to dig into and produce stories that resonated with people who regularly read my work, and we benefited. My audience benefited, I benefited. I'm specifically referring to the U.S. diplomatic cables. There are dozens upon dozens of important revelations that came out of them. One that comes to mind that I think of often cited but remains critical is that these cables revealed the way in which some drone strikes were being carried out by our U.S. military, and the fact that specifically in Yemen, General David Petraeus had this informal agreement or formal agreement with Ali Abdullah Saleh where they would claim responsibility for the drone strikes and say those were Yemen bombs when in fact it was the U.S. that was carrying out drone strikes.

That's one example. We obviously don't have time to go through many of the other ones, but on climate change, on wages issues, issues of, you know, all kinds of human rights issues that had ramifications that rippled through Egypt and Tunisia, and influenced some of the uprisings in those countries. That was extremely beneficial to the entire world to learn what was going on behind closed doors with diplomats. We know that the State Department was selling natural gas fracking through its work in various

countries. She has had a tremendous impact in bettering our understanding about how not only the U.S. carries out wars militarily, but how we pursue agendas in different regions of the world.

Aaron Mate: Nathan, we haven't heard Chelsea speak very much in her own words. She made a statement at her trial, but otherwise we've only been able to hear from her either through her attorneys or through her occasional statements on *Twitter* or in OpEd pieces. Based especially on what she said at the trial, what do we know about what motivated her to carry out this huge act of whistle-blowing with such serious consequences to her life?

Nathan Fuller: We know that she took those consequences very seriously, and that this was a very deliberate meaningful action. Not some reckless, wanton act as the government tried to portray it. She really looked at these documents and videos and understood that they were going to bring a new context to the American people, and she knew that it was going to have ramifications for herself. She was willing to die or go to prison and understood that that would be worth it. She said that she wanted to spark a debate. She hoped that the American people would be interested. She was heartened when she was still able to view the news and saw the initial reaction to that *Collateral Murder* video, and she saw that it was sparking discussion and debate. People actually cared. She wanted that debate and she got it. It certainly was by all accounts a success.

Aaron Mate: Kevin, among the charges that she faced from the government was aiding the enemy. What was the significance of her facing that charge, and also of the fact that she was ultimately cleared of it?

Kevin Gosztola: The significance was the innovation behind it. The way that military prosecutors went about prosecuting her. It amounted to calling

her a traitor essentially. Beyond that, there was the implication for media outlets, whether we're talking about the *New York Times* or we're talking about the *Washington Post*, or even an independent media outlet like my former *firedoglake.com*, which is where I was affiliated when I covered the trial. This idea that if we are publishing information that was previously classified and somehow related to national security or the military on the internet, then we are aiding the enemy because people who are in the Islamic state or Al-Qaeda or any groups that are considered terrorist groups could access that information and use it to their own ends or however they would choose to. That's a very dangerous argument. It goes up against the freedom of the press. It was a fortunate outcome that the military judge, Denise Lind, determined that there was no evidence to substantiate convicting Chelsea Manning on this charge. I think it's very important to emphasize that legally speaking she's not a traitor. She was acquitted of aiding the enemy.

Aaron Mate: Let's talk a bit about her prison sentence and actually what led her to be imprisoned. Nathan, I'm wondering if you could tell us about Adrian Lamo, this hacker who Chelsea Manning communicated with and ultimately who turned her in.

Nathan Fuller: Adrian Lamo was someone who she reached out to talk about her time in the Army and her feelings of insecurity and anxiety, her questioning things. Adrian posed as a... He said even, "Treat me as a priest." He posed as a journalist or a priest, someone that she could confide in privately, and he burned her like never before and turned her into the FBI and was the reason for her getting picked up as quickly as she did.

Aaron Mate: Then, that leads to her imprisonment. Tell us about what kind of conditions that she faced after she revealed her sexual identity. I remem-

ber she was confined then to, basically, cage-like conditions, denied access to her lawyer. Talk about what she faced.

Nathan Fuller: Before she even came out publicly in that way, she was mistreated badly in her pre-trial detention. She was arrested in Iraq, brought to Kuwait where she was held in a cage. Treated worse than an animal and wanted to kill herself there, and was just treated brutally. She actually didn't know where she was being taken from there. She thought she might go to Guantanamo but was brought to Quantico, the Marine brig, which is now closed. She endured solitary confinement for several months. She was abused and mocked by prison officials and a lot of that came out in the trial.

Despite all that, she survived. She endured and was a very strong poised voice in court. Unbelievably, she took an even bigger risk upon her conviction and she came out as a woman, knowing she was going to go to an all-male military prison, and knew that was going to be an incredibly uphill, arduous battle. She has become a voice for trans rights. She got the Army to allow her to begin hormone therapy, and she's become a hero not only to the people who appreciate her whistle-blowing but who appreciate her speaking out for prisoners rights, trans rights, and just for respectability for trans people.

Aaron Mate: Yeah. Kevin, if you could pick up here. I mean, this is what partly makes her story so extraordinary. After committing one of the most bold acts of whistle-blowing in history, she then goes and takes on this fight for her rights as a transgender woman against an institution like the U.S. military, not exactly known for its inclusiveness.

Kevin Gosztola: It almost transcends her whistle-blowing act. I exchanged letters with her while she was in Leavenworth Prison, and it came through. One of the things that I

was stunned by is that she was so willing to make herself vulnerable and allowed people to see what was going on inside and how she was struggling. Invite people to join her in trying to make sure that the military didn't succeed finally in actually breaking her and actually pushing her to that moment where she could no longer move on with her life. In the letter she described how people who were being bullied from LGBTQ people, how they would write to her, young people, people who were going through experiences would write letters to her. She would read them and they would be awful, and she would feel so bad for them. She would occasionally have the time to write replies to these people.

I just thought, this is remarkable. This is someone who doesn't have to do this, but she's taking on this role as someone who people can look up to and see as a fighter, and from a place where she doesn't have any power. The U.S. military is one of the worst places you could possibly be and come out as a transgender person, and she still looked it head on and said, "This is who I am, and this is who I'm going to be during my sentence."

Aaron Mate: Nathan, what do we know about what Chelsea Manning's plans are now that she is free? Where does the grassroots campaign that supported her go? I know you have this effort seeking to overturn her initial sentence.

Nathan Fuller: Right. Personally, she's indicated she might want to go back to Maryland to live with some of her family there. She might want to go to college or write a book. She's become a really outspoken voice with her *Guardian* column and *Medium* blog, and I expect that voice only to grow. I'm really excited to see what she does with it. Yeah, I want to remind people that while she's out of prison, and I'm incredibly grateful for that, her case is

not quite over. The appeal is ongoing, and it's really important for her personally to clear her record, to not be dishonorably discharged from the Army, which would act like a felony on her record. It matters more broadly.

Her case set a precedent for leaking to the media, someone being sentenced that long for leaking to the media. Also, she wants to overturn and challenge the Espionage Act convictions because of the way the Espionage Act was used so broadly equating whistle-blowing with espionage. She wants to finally challenge that. What the Espionage Act needs if we're going to keep it at all is a public interest defense. People need to be able to defend themselves in court, which Chelsea Manning was not allowed to do by explaining that their actions were done in the public interest, and that should supersede the alleged potential harm caused by them. Chelsea clearly had the public interest in mind when she was leaking documents.

Aaron Mate: Kevin Gosztola, your final thoughts as we wrap this segment on the release of Chelsea Manning today.

Kevin Gosztola: I think it's profound, and everyone who was involved in making it possible, the grassroots movement, they have themselves to congratulate. I think everyone should just enjoy it. It's not a lot of times that we have these kinds of successes. I know that she's also being released the same day that another political prisoner, Oscar Lopez Rivera is released. Not to get into his case, but just to say that these victories don't come often. When they do come, especially in this political moment with President Donald Trump, it's important to remind ourselves of the kind of power we have to influence and make sure that we stick up for people on our side and on our own, and take care of each other.

Aaron Mate: You know what, Nathan? Let me pick up on that point

and ask you as someone who was so involved in this grassroots campaign to free Chelsea Manning. What kind of challenges you faced to bring this case to light and to get public attention around it, especially with a media that while it covered the *WikiLeaks* disclosures was not so sympathetic to her plight?

Nathan Fuller: Right. The mainstream media got hundreds of stories from all these documents and repaid her by basically ignoring her trial for way too long. Not showing up to any of the pre-trial hearings. Before that, the military made it very hard to cover this case. Kevin and I and Alexa O'Brien and just a couple others were those who were at every single hearing. For the first several days we were not allowed to use computers to type. Obviously we couldn't record, and people couldn't see video of the trial, so we had paper and pen and had to write down everything in a full day of court.

The military knew that that was going to make it more difficult for the press to pick up on this story, and the press failed to do so. It took a lot of work. It took a lot of organizing rallies and writing about this case to get people to pay attention and to finally pick it up. We actually got the *New York Times* public editor, Margaret Sullivan, who was at the time the public editor, to embarrass her own reporters into showing up at the trial, and they finally did. I think that is part of the reason that so many people know about and care about her case today.

—*The Real News Network*, May 17, 2017

http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=31&Itemid=74&jumival=19121

Innocent Prisoners

Decades of life lost

BY LORENZO JOHNSON



Lorenzo Johnson

Society views the role of a prosecutor as being a seeker of truth, not a gatekeeper of false convictions. Statistics from the volcano of recent exonerations show that the average exoneree spends between thirteen-and-a-half and fifteen years in prison before finally being released.

Most of the time, our cries are not taken seriously or even heard until a crooked cop or prosecutor comes under fire. Society is not privy to our struggles until they're all over and we are freed. In each of the past three years, record-breaking numbers of

exonerations have taken place. The scary thing is that, in a third of these exonerations, prosecutorial misconduct was behind the exonerees' wrongful convictions.

Why do we spend multiple decades in prison while innocent? Our innocence claims are met with extreme resistance by our prosecutors; even when our claims have merit. And let's not leave out the withholding of evidence of our innocence by our prosecutors. That's right, they knew we were innocent, but they have continued to fight to maintain our convictions. These actions are a disgrace to honorable prosecutors who come to work every day to seek justice.

This epidemic of wrongful convictions has now made society question whether prosecutors are protecting the integrity of the justice system. After misconduct findings, these same prosecutors get to continue their jobs as if nothing ever happened. That's right, after knowingly and intentionally convicting and maintaining wrongful convictions, they aren't held responsible!

At one time, if a prosecutor reopened a case that they felt was unjust, they would be frowned upon by their coworkers and considered "soft on crime." This would have been career suicide years ago, but now it is a common practice by genuine prosecutors. Look at the explosion of Conviction Integrity Units popping up across our country.

In many states, after an innocent prisoner is released, there is no reentry assistance for them. Now keep in mind, the majority of exonerees have spent decades in prison. Some are homeless, with no family, and are basically told, "...now make it the best way you know how." There are multiple reentry programs and people of assistance for released guilty

prisoners, but often nothing for wrongfully convicted exonerees. This should be viewed as a crime in itself.

Mistakes happen, and yes, an innocent person can be wrongfully convicted but, what should never be viewed as a mistake or error is when an agent of the court knowingly and intentionally plays a part in misconduct that leads to an innocent prisoner being falsely convicted—or maintaining a wrongful conviction. A law should be enacted universally to terminate their law license immediately in these situations to show society and innocent prisoners that this kind of injustice will no longer be tolerated.

Lorenzo Johnson served 16-and-a-half years of a life-without-parole sentence until 2012, when the Third Circuit Federal Court of Appeals ruled there was legally insufficient evidence for his conviction. He remained free for four months, after which the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously reinstated the conviction and ordered him back to prison to resume the sentence. With the support of The Pennsylvania Innocence Project, he is continuing to fight for his freedom.

He is scheduled for a court hearing in July 2017 to present evidence of innocence and prosecutorial misconduct.

—Huffington Post, June 10, 2017

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/593c04bfe4b014ae8c69e0d2>

Write to:

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www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org

Sign his petition and learn more at:

<http://www.freelorenzojohnson.org/sign-the-petition.html>

www.twitter.com/FreeRenz

**FREE
LORENZO
JOHNSON**

Why Reality Winner Deserves Support

BY JEFF PATERSON

Reality Winner is a 25-year-old Air Force veteran who was arrested in Augusta, Georgia on June 3rd. She allegedly released classified NSA documents to *The Intercept*, which were the basis for a story about Russian hacking efforts against U.S. election systems leading up to last year's presidential election. Reality is currently in the Lincoln County Jail in Georgia, and faces up to ten years in prison.

Reality Winner—yes, that is her given legal name—did the right thing, and she should be defended.

Reality allegedly leaked information regarding attempted interference in an election, tampering that many believe assisted in Donald Trump's presidential win—despite earning nearly four million fewer votes than Hillary Clinton. The documents published by *The Intercept* only confirm earlier accounts of U.S. election hacking attempts and, given the current administration's extreme antagonisms against facts, the release of these documents was clearly in the public interest. Like the vast majority of government documents that are hidden from public view, these reports should have been declassified by now anyway.

Now Trump's own Department of Justice has targeted Reality. It's a sinister move, but on the other hand, simply a continuation of Obama's unprecedented zeal in prosecuting whistle-blowers. Trump inherited an atrocious War on Leaks, and Reality is the latest victim of that war. Her arrest is a signal to the world, and the four million other Americans with access to classified information: Only sanctioned leaks benefiting the government will be tolerated.

There's a striking hypocrisy to Trump's crackdown. Less than a month ago the President was criticized for

carelessly leaking classified information to Russian officials during a White House meeting. We now know this information concerned a bomb that is being developed by ISIS. This is standard operating procedure: lawmakers have no issue leaking classified information if it somehow furthers their interest, but they aggressively prosecute citizens who expose actual wrongdoing.

I believe that Reality Winner's possible actions should be understood within the context of recent heroic whistleblowing. Shortly before leaving office, Barack Obama commuted the remaining sentence of U.S. Army soldier Chelsea Manning, who was facing 27 more years in prison for exposing war crimes and corruption. Edward Snowden, who leaked information about our government's massive spying program, was granted asylum in Russia but faces espionage charges back home. Just like Manning, it seems that Reality was able to see the inner workings of the United States' war machine.

She served in the Air Force from 2013 until early this year, working as a linguist. Like Snowden, she would have had a better view than most as to how our security state works. Up until last week, she was a military defense contractor with the Pluribus International Corporation in the suburbs outside of Augusta, Georgia, and had Top Secret security clearance.

The U.S. government has spent tens-of-millions of dollars in better auditing capabilities since the disclosures by Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden. Those who would rather keep the public in the dark as to what their government is doing with their tax dollars and in their name, have redoubled their efforts to identify

whistle-blowers much more quickly. Winner's arrest was facilitated by the government's increased ability to more easily identify the relatively small number of people that recently accessed documents in question as well as the yellow-colored, nearly-invisible micro dots that most color printers today use to include a printer's serial number and time stamp on each printed page. This appears to have contributed to the focus on Reality Winner.

Reality is expected to plead not guilty to charges against her today. We don't know exactly why she allegedly released the NSA documents to the press, but we do have some insight into her views about the world. Her social media accounts show a woman who, like a clear majority of Americans, is critical of Donald Trump. She has also voiced support for Edward Snowden, and opposition to the U.S. fabricating a reason to attack Iran.

According to *The Intercept*, [Winner's leak] “ratchets up the stakes of the ongoing investigations into collusion between the Trump campaign and Russian operatives...If collusion can ultimately be demonstrated—a big if at this point—then the assistance on Russia's part went beyond allegedly hacking email to serve a propaganda campaign, and bled into an attack on U.S. election infrastructure itself.”

We are talking about a potentially monumental story that might require prosecutions, but Reality Winner shouldn't be the one who ends up in jail. While the details of the story continue to unfold, by all indications she deserves our support, and the release of these documents should be celebrated.

—*Courage to Resist*, June 8, 2017

<https://couragetoresist.org/drop-charges-reality-winner/#wpforms-27444>

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Note to Readers:

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

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

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

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

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

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Note from the Editors

For every issue of *Socialist Viewpoint* there are many more articles with important information that we would like to publish than we have space for. Here is an annotated list of some of them:

“Secret U.S. Drone Deaths”
U.S. has only acknowledged a fifth of its lethal strikes, new study finds
By Murtaza Hussain
—*The Intercept*, June 13, 2017
<https://theintercept.com/2017/06/13/drone-strikes-columbia-law-human-rights-yemen/>

“Amy Goodman’s Biased Syria Coverage”
Peace activists confront Amy Goodman
Interview by Ann Garrison
—*Black Agenda Report*, May 16, 2017
https://www.blackagendareport.com/activists_confront_amy_goodman_on_syria

“Deportations?”
Trump can’t hold a candle to Obama
By Glen Ford
—*Black Agenda Report*, May 23, 2017
https://www.blackagendareport.com/obama_beats_trump_deportations

“Towards the Corbyn Doctrine”
By Josh White
—*Counter Punch*, May 23, 2017
<http://www.counterpunch.org/2017/05/23/towards-the-corbyn-doctrine/>

“Working Full-Time and Still Broke”
Why U.S. Manufacturing Workers Are On Food Stamps And Medicaid
By David Kiley
—*Forbes*, May 10, 2017
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidkiley5/2016/05/10/why-u-s-manufacturing-workers-are-on-food-stamps-and-medicaid/#230afa0d75c3>

“Hands Off Venezuela!”
Statement from People’s Anti-imperialist and Antifascist Front National Meeting
—*Marxism-Leninism Today*, May 23, 2017
<https://mltoday.com>

“Universal Health Coverage for All”
Cuba calls for universal health coverage at World Health Organization World Assembly
By Redacción Internacional
—*Granma*, May 24, 2017
<http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2017-05-24/cuba-calls-for-universal-health-coverage-at-who-world-assembly>

“Criminal Nation”
Obama and Trump both should be jailed for war crimes
By Glen Ford
—*Black Agenda Report*, May 10, 2015
https://www.blackagendareport.com/jail_obama_and_trump_for_war_crimes

“Cops Out of Our Schools”
Students launch campaign at Phoenix Union High School District schools
By BrieAnna J. Frank
—*The Arizona Republic*, May 4, 2017
<http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/2017/05/05/cops-outta-campus-campaign-launches-phoenix-union-high-schools/311279001/>

“School Vouchers Hurt Students”
Trump and DeVos couldn’t care less
By Glen Ford
—*Black Agenda Report*, May 3, 2017
https://www.blackagendareport.com/vouchers_hurt_students_study_says

“Student Murdered by the Alt-Right”
By Brady O’Shea and Leonard Klein
—*NORCALSocialism.org*, May 24, 2017
<http://norcalsocialism.org/this-student-was-murdered-by-the-alt-right/>

“Parents Against Child Protective Services”
Fighting against corruption and “medical kidnap”
By Michelle Chan
—*San Francisco Bay View*, May 5, 2017
<http://sfbayview.com/2017/05/parents-against-cps-corruption-fights-medical-kidnap/>

“Americans Dying from Preventable Causes”
By Nika Knight
—*Common Dreams*, May 19, 2017
<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/05/19/global-study-shows-americans-dying-preventable-causes-shocking-rates>

“Imperialist Pig Bernie Sanders”
By Glen Ford
—*Black Agenda Report*, June 14, 2017
https://www.blackagendareport.com/bernie_sanders_imperial_pig

“The Drone War”
Understanding who must die from above
By Tyler Wilch
—*CounterPunch*, June 13, 2017
<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/13/the-drone-war-understanding-who-must-die-from-above/>

“The Clintons Had Slaves”
But the prison labor system is also rotten to the core...
By Nathan J. Robinson
—*Current Affairs*, June 6, 2017
<https://www.currentaffairs.org/2017/06/the-clintons-had-slaves>

“Cuba Will Not Bow to Trump”
By Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla
—*CounterPunch*, June 22, 2017
<https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/22/cuba-will-not-bow-to-trumps-threats/>



Corbyn speaks to supporters on the day the party launched its manifesto in Beaumont Park, Huddersfield. Read *British Elections: Corbyn Upsurge* on page 15.

On the Front Cover: Grief turns to outrage when protesters learn a recent renovation may have fueled the inferno in Grenfell Tower public housing block. Read *Grenfell—A Call to Action* on page 14.



Cubans sitting and strolling along the Malecon, in Havana. Read *Cuban Revolution: Still in Motion* on page 34.



New report shows corporations and Western governments continue to profit from looting Africa. Read *Looting Africa* on page 33.

★ ★ ★ **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.”