

SocialistViewpoint

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

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2018 VOL. 18 NO. 6

*Today
Capitalism
has outlived
its usefulness*

— Martin Luther King —



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Talking Back to the Talking Heads

BY SUKEY WOLF

This piece calls out the propagandists of the capitalist class. One missing element is how the liberal mainstream media covers for the horrible racism of politicians of both parties. They also have hidden McCain's racism in the disgusting eulogizing of him from all quarters of the capitalist media and their political spokespeople. The divide is clearly between the working class and the .01 percent—the capitalist class—which is the class that the big media represents so very loyally! —Carole Seligman

As a political radical, I need to follow national and world affairs. That usually means tuning into CNN or MSNBC. But I have grown utterly disgusted with the liberal news media. By “liberal,” I mean those who consider themselves politically progressive, and yet believe that capitalism can be reformed.

It doesn't take much watching to realize that the mainstream media wants us to believe a few key things about today's world. The first is that Donald J. Trump is newsworthy 24-7. This was bad enough during the campaign, when his every speech was mind-numbingly repetitive. Wall-to-wall coverage insults us, and only serves to legitimize his reign.

Secondly, what really gets me talking back to the talking heads is their belief that the United States is a bastion of freedom and democracy for the world. Liberals never mention that this country continues to support dictators and is the biggest global arms dealer; that its foreign policy creates war and suffering, not peace. Highly-paid pundits like Rachel Maddow, Brian Williams, Anderson Cooper, *etc.*, who should know better, actually defend the FBI, despite its long history of spying on, killing and threatening civil rights activists. As if the FBI, which

carried out the infamous COINTELPRO program, could rescue us from a president who thinks he's king!

And what about those talking heads? You know, the assorted journalists, professors, ambassadors, generals and attorneys and Democrat politicians that populate cable news. Most are incensed over Trump's boorish behavior. But never do they offer any concrete solutions. Like Defund the Pentagon, not Planned Parenthood! All they can do is say, “vote for Democrats.” Everyone knows full well that the Democratic Party has never genuinely stood strong for ordinary working people. It needs corporate sponsors.

Thirdly, mainstream liberal news wants us to believe that every issue has two co-equal and opposing sides. It's what they call “objective.” Progressives know in our very bones that this is not true. There is our side—the side of justice, equal opportunity and human rights. And the other side—war and abuse. To me it's not even close!

For example, a few weeks ago, I participated in a counter-demonstration at a family planning clinic. We were lined up against an anti-abortion group called Patriot Prayer, which regularly allies with armed white supremacists and other ultra-right goons. The scores of cops there, complete with riot gear and pepper spray, were clearly on the side of the right-wingers. They were there to intimidate unarmed clinic defenders. They failed.

The local news coverage that evening was typical and infuriating. Instead of accurately reporting the event (our side outnumbered the right-wingers six to one,) the news focused on the cops and their “neutral” efforts to keep the peace. It also didn't report that FBI agents visited homes of clinic activists to scare us away from the action. The agents failed, of course.

“Experts” drone on about the Mueller investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election, anesthetizing everyone. Meanwhile, Trump upends environmental protections, appoints reactionary judges, and bombs other countries. Outrage exhaustion sets in.

This is no accident. Like the politicians, the media also has corporate masters who must be fed. They want to distract us, convert into despair our deep dissatisfaction with life under capitalism. And make it less likely we'll fight back.

Luckily, there is an alternative to the liberal press. Publications like the *Freedom Socialist* provide a welcome relief from the corporate media. Instead of promoting ignorance and apathy, how about journalists covering real people's courage and struggles, and the deep resistance to Trumpism. How about inspiring us with stories of people organizing for better working conditions, public housing and education and healthcare, and an end to police abuse.

To their credit, some mainstream reporters broke open the horror news of the U.S. tearing immigrant children and infants from their parents at the border. The uproar over this may just halt this state terrorism. That's what good journalism can do, should do.

I subscribe to and support the *Freedom Socialist*. In its pages I find hope and optimism and the feeling of real community—just the antidote to isolation and government lies. And I've learned something else: fighting back just feels good!

—*Freedom Socialist Party*, August 2018

<http://socialism.com/fs-article/talking-back-to-the-talking-heads/>

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Capitalist Ju\$stice vs. A Socialist World

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

“Thinking outside the box” is a popular metaphor that means, “to think differently—from a different or new perspective.” It’s meant to encourage creative thinking—to find new or different ways to solve problems.

But when it comes to the rationalization and justification of capitalism by the capitalist class, there is no “outside” of the box.

When it comes to war, the capitalists say, “there has always been war—it’s human nature to be war-like.” When it comes to economic inequality they say, “there has always been a wealthy minority in power over the masses—the wealthy are on top because they are smarter, better, stronger. The poor are poor because they are inferior.”

This is social Darwinism and it is beat into our heads from the time we are born. We are taught to believe that this is the way it is, has always been, and will always be. It’s what justifies Manifest Destiny, slavery and imperialism—the “great white hope” that is meant to “tame and/or slaughter the savages” and establish “civilization,”—*i.e.*, white domination by force of violence.

Capitalist Ju\$stice is determined by income inequality

You may have noticed that the wealthy rarely go to jail and almost never get the death penalty or life without parole—these punishments are for the masses. Not for the capitalists.

In an August 31, 2018 *New York Times* article by Robert H. Frank titled, “How Rising Inequality Has Widened the Justice Gap,” the author states:

“Rising inequality has harmed low-income families not only by depriving them of a fair share of society’s income

growth, but also in a more specific way: It has stacked the legal system even more heavily against them. According to a recent survey, more than 70 percent of low-income American households had been involved in eviction cases, labor law cases, and other civil legal disputes during the preceding year, and in more than 80 percent of those cases they lacked effective legal representation.”

That’s because in a capitalist society like ours it takes money to have adequate legal representation—just as it takes money to eat, have a home, clothes, medical care, education.

The article goes on:

“Many top earners are not only talented and hardworking, but they are also lucky to have grown up in privileged circumstances. And it is one thing to say that someone who is ten percent more skillful should be paid ten percent more. But in today’s winner-take-all marketplace, those who are only one percent more talented often earn thousands-of-times more. These observations are difficult to square with anyone’s conception of a just society.”

This is because capitalism—by its very structure—is designed to protect the privileges of the wealthy by any means necessary. That is the purpose of the courts, the police and the military. After all, workers are talented and hardworking too, but we are not adequately compensated for it.

The economic structure of capitalism and the laws created and enforced by capitalists are all designed to allow the wealthy to accumulate the profits that the working masses produce.

Workers are only compensated for our labor by what we demand and can win through cooperative actions such as mass demonstrations, union organiz-

ing and strikes. As revolutionary socialist James P. Cannon once put it, “The ethic of capitalism is: ‘From each whatever you can get out of him—to each whatever he can grab.’”¹

Even the so-called democratic electoral system is rigged in favor of the wealthy. It’s a system that allows working people to vote for one wealthy representative of the capitalist class over another. We do not get to vote on laws, or who sits on the Supreme Court. We have no say over the cost of credit card interest rates, gas and electric rates, education, food or housing, *etc.* We have no say over the costs to us, of any of the basic necessities of life.

Capitalism is democracy for the wealthy and dictatorship over the working class.

Capitalist pillaging and destruction of the world

Capitalism is a stage of social evolution that has outlived its usefulness. It destroys the world in order to increase private profits for the wealthy.

The gap between the rich and the poor has grown astronomically in the last few decades. Not just in the United States but all over the world. And it is reinforced by massive military interventions—led by the United States and its allies—across the globe.

Natural resources wherever they are found, are taken by force of violence for the benefit of privately owned corporations under the control of the U.S.-dominated capitalist class.

The U.S. war on Afghanistan is a prime example

In an October 4, 2018 *New York Times* article by Mujib Marshal titled, “As Afghanistan Frays, Blackwater Founder Erik Prince Is Everywhere,”

after 17 years of the U.S. war for natural resources in Afghanistan, and, at the cost to taxpayers of \$45 billion a year,² the U.S. wants to privatize the war to better achieve this goal:

“Mr. Prince laid out what he called a ‘rationalization’ of private contracting already happening: a leaner mission of 6,000 private contractors providing ‘skeletal structure support’ and training for Afghan forces...All of this, Mr. Prince said, would bring down the annual cost of the war to roughly a fifth of the current amount... Mr. Prince lists one of his goals as: ‘Develop and produce key rare earth minerals to restore U.S. high-tech manufacturing supply chain.’”

(By the way, Mr. Prince’s sister happens to be Betsy DeVos, Secretary of Education under Trump—capitalism is “all in the family.”)

As further proof of the purpose of the U.S. war on Afghanistan, in another New York Times article by Mujib Marshal dated October 6, 2018 titled, “Afghanistan Signs Major Mining Deals Despite Legal Concerns,” the author reports:

“The Afghan government on Friday signed two contracts for the exploration of copper and gold deposits in the north, in a bid to move away from the country’s dependence on foreign aid by tapping its mineral wealth. ...The contracts, which had been stalled for years, were signed in Washington between the Afghan ministers of finance and mining, and executives from Centar Ltd., an investment company founded by Ian Hannam, a former J.P. Morgan banker who partnered with local Afghan firms to bid for the mines.”

This shows how further enriching the wealth of the capitalist class at the expense of human life and the health of the planet is the very purpose of the capitalist dictatorship and their wars. In fact, the U.S. privately-owned corporations of the military industrial complex are the biggest polluters on our planet.

Socialism is thinking outside of the capitalist “box”

So what will socialism—the next stage of human social evolution—look like?

Socialism’s fundamental economic structure turns capitalism—the private ownership of the means of production—upside-down.

Socialism is an economic system that democratizes production in order to fulfill the needs and wants of all on an equal basis, instead of on the accumulation of private profits for the few.

Production for need and want instead of private profit will free up resources to ensure safety and efficiency on the job—both for the health and safety of workers and the preservation of our environment.

It will eliminate the waste of producing inferior products designed to break down so that they have to constantly be replaced—a standard practice of capitalist production to increase profits. Instead, we can concentrate on the production of durable products that can be upgraded as technology evolves.

Capitalist production pollutes and destroys the environment because taking the proper precautions to produce durable goods and to preserve the health

and safety of workers and the planet cuts into their profits. That’s why factories spew their filth in the air, land and sea with abandon and without guilt.

Cleaning up the pollution caused by capitalist production is paid for by the taxes taken out of our paychecks—the billionaire CEOs don’t pay anything—and they still can’t get the job done!

Socialism will end all that.

Without the private, profit-driven capitalist motive of production, we will be free to revolutionize production methods without sacrificing the well being of people or the planet.

The goal will be to produce durable goods more efficiently—maximizing automation while gradually shortening the workweek and increasing living standards for all—so that everyone can have, not only all the necessities and wants of life, but more free time to pursue personal interests, the arts, scientific advancements.

We will be free to study life on earth, preserve our environment and explore the intelligence and diversity of the species that share our planet with us.

It will be a world without racism, sexism, war, jails, poverty, starvation,



homelessness, ignorance, despair, drug addiction, crime and pestilence.

Under a democratic and cooperative socialist society, the free and equal development of each individual's talents and abilities will finally become the condition for the free and equal development of all of us.

There is only one thing that stands in the way of our road to a socialist utopia—and that is capitalism—the private ownership of the means of production by a tiny, despotic, divisive, parasitic capitalist class that can only survive by oppression, violence and war. Capitalism has to go!

Under a socialist society—with an ecologically safe and carefully planned communal economy, there are no obstacles that we won't be able to overcome. It will be a society designed to encourage human development to its fullest while preserving and safeguarding the health and welfare of our planet for the benefit of all.

“Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Proletarians of All Countries, Unite!”

—The Manifesto of the Communist Party, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels³

1 “What Socialist America Will Look Like,” by James P. Cannon
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1953/socialistamer.htm>

2 “Pentagon says war in Afghanistan costs taxpayers \$45 billion a year”
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/pentagon-says-afghan-war-costs-taxpayers-45-billion-per-year>

3 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch04.htm>

U.S. Military Spending Threatens More War

BY BARRY SHEPPARD

With overwhelming support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress, the new 2019 budget for the military, beginning October 1, is a 13 percent increase over 2017, and is even more than what Trump had proposed.

The U.S. spends more on its armed forces than China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Britain, France and Japan combined, according to the United Nations. About 17 percent of the \$4 trillion overall budget goes to the military.

The official figure for next year is \$716 billion. There are additional funds for the military hidden in spending by other federal departments, including the CIA, and the real figure inches toward \$1 trillion, according to the *Washington Post*.

A dangerous aspect is that there will be billions in new investments in nuclear weapons research and new nuclear warheads, including so-called “tactical” smaller bombs designed for the battlefield, not cities, making them more likely to be used. But any such use could easily get out of hand and spiral into a full-blown nuclear war.

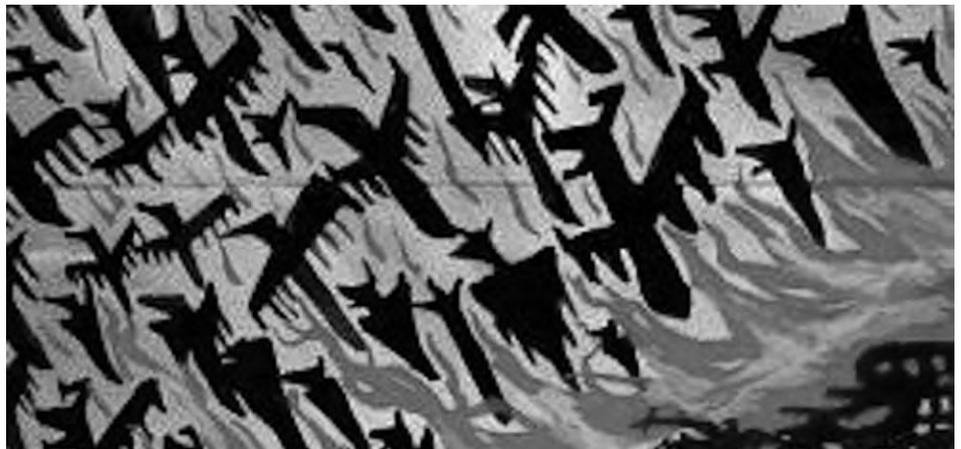
This program, euphemistically called “modernization” of the nuclear arsenal, was started by the Obama administration, and was to cost \$1 trillion over ten

years. The new military budget continues and expands the program.

We should remember that it was the U.S. that first developed the atom bomb, and was the first to use it twice in 1945 against cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing hundreds-of-thousands immediately and many more from radiation-induced cancers in the years since and is the only country to use them.

The use of these weapons, many military experts have said, was unnecessary to end the U.S.-Japan inter-imperialist war. Japan was already defeated. What Washington wanted to demonstrate was its willingness to use such weapons against civilians if it wanted to do so, a monstrous threat against the other nations of the world.

Its immediate purpose was to threaten the USSR, as Washington prepared to turn away from its wartime alliance with the Soviet Union to active hostility. The U.S., with diplomatic help from Britain, completed this turn by 1947, and set the USSR in its sights. While the development of the bomb by the Soviet Union blocked any dreams by the U.S. of a quick atomic attack, the nuclear arms race was on. The madness of “Mutually Assured



Destruction (MAD)” became the norm throughout the Cold War.

The U.S. contemplated using the bomb in the Korean War, and directly threatened to do so in the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and in the 1973 Israeli-Arab war. Fortunately, there were cooler heads in Washington during the Korean War, and in the Kremlin in 1962 and 1973 that defused these threats.

After the Second World War, Congress ceded its Constitutional obligation to decide whether to go to war to the executive branch. The last time Congress declared war was in 1941. One aspect was to cede to one person, the President, the sole authority to launch atomic war. Trump once mused that if the U.S. has nuclear weapons, why not use them?

Wherever the President goes, he is accompanied by an aide who carries the “football”—a briefcase with the codes to unleash such a horrific event—a danger that has been brought closer by the decision to build the “tactical” nuclear weapons, which will relaunch the nuclear arms race, as other nations try to keep up.

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, which since the age of the bomb began, has printed on its cover a “doomsday clock” with a hand pointing how close we are to midnight. In the light of this recent development set in motion first by Obama, it has moved that hand closer to 12.

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a general relaxation of the fear of atomic war. That sentiment is now obsolete.

Another aspect of ceding warmaking powers to the executive has been the many wars, some hot and some covert, the U.S. has been waging since 1945. These include the seemingly endless wars in the Mideast we are living through.

Another aspect of the new military budget is additional “emergency” funding tagged for “overseas contingency operations,” meaning just such

wars. The budget sets aside funds for new ones down the line.

The “Defense” Department was accurately named the Department of War until the end of the Second World War. The U.S. has not waged a defensive war since the war of 1812 against the British. I’ll use the term War Department.

The increase in military spending in the new budget has been advocated by the War Department in recent years. “Our regional competitors in the Pacific and Europe have been studying our strengths and our vulnerabilities for more than a decade,” Major General Paul A. Chamberlain said in February. “Their modernization efforts are slowly eroding our competitive advantage, and this budget request addresses that, by providing the necessary resources to ensure the Army’s superiority.”

“It is incumbent upon us to field a more lethal forces if our nation is to retain the ability to defend ourselves and what we stand for,” War Secretary Jim Mattis said in outlining a new national war strategy in July.

That new strategy states that “inter-state strategic competition,” especially with China and Russia, and “not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”

This new strategy is rooted in the recognition that the old “world order” that ensured U.S. domination has eroded, and U.S. imperialism faces new challenges in a changing world. Obama tried to get out of the Middle East region with his “pivot to Asia [meaning China]” but couldn’t do both. Mattis now supports a larger military footprint in Afghanistan while simultaneously preparing for conflict with China and Russia.

This has repercussions with both Koreas. Military analysts are saying that the

U.S. must keep its troops and bases in South Korea as part of its aggressive stance toward China.

The bipartisan support for the military spending in the new bill is indicated by two quotes. “The Budget Agreement,” Trump tweeted, “gives Secretary Mattis what he needs to keep America Great.”

The Senate’s top Democrat, Chuck Schumer, called the new budget a “win for the American people.”

However, Trump objected to non-spending aspects of the new law. When signing the bill Trump decreed that 50 provisions unconstitutionally encroached on his prerogatives as “Commander in Chief and as the sole representative of the Nation in foreign affairs.”

In recent decades, beginning with Ronald Reagan, such “signing statements” have been used by presidents to circumvent Congress, and amount to declarations that the provisions they object to will not be enforced. This is part of ceding power to the executive.

Apparently, Congress inserted provisions in the budget law to assert some authority over the President in conducting foreign policy, which Trump has in effect nullified.

While such signing statements are not new, Trump’s use of them in this instance are part of his drive to establish an authoritarian regime of the type we have seen in Hungary and Poland, which is new. This deserves fuller discussion.



Socialist Orientation to Splits in the Trump Administration and Capitalist Class

By BRIAN BECKER

The struggle inside and among the capitalist ruling class is taking another sharp, surprising turn with the publication in the *New York Times* of an extraordinary anonymous article by someone described as a top official within the Trump Administration.

The article not only denounces Donald Trump but asserts that there has been a secret effort underway from senior Trump officials to more directly control his presidency until it comes to an end—“one way or another.” This high-level grouping has secretly weighed the possibility of removing him from office. For now, the official says, they are continuing to work inside the Administration to limit the destructive impact of Trump for what they say is the good of the country. The article asserts, “many Trump appointees have vowed to do what we can to preserve our democratic institutions while thwarting Mr. Trump’s more misguided impulses until he is out of office.”

What is going on here? What should socialists take from this new re-emer-

gence of the “Stop Trump” movement—this time from within the summits of the Republican-led administration? Is it a matter of rats preparing the lifeboats for their escape from Trump’s sinking ship or are they heroically and covertly sinking their own boat to save all of us from their evil captain?

The expansion of the war machine, deregulation and massive tax giveaway to corporate America are highlighted as “bright spots” in the administration

Not surprisingly, for the author, they are indeed heroes:

“The erratic behavior [of Trump] would be more concerning if it weren’t for unsung heroes in and around the White House. Some of

his aides have been cast as villains by the media. But in private, they have gone to great lengths to keep bad decisions contained to the West Wing, though they are clearly not always successful.

“It may be cold comfort in this chaotic era, but Americans should know that there are adults in the room. We fully recognize what is happening. And we are trying to do what’s right even when Donald Trump won’t.”

Praising Trump’s service to the war machine and Wall Street

Why have the anonymous “resistance fighters” inside the White House taken up this effort to constrain and potentially end the Trump presidency? Was it the mass deportations, the deregulation of capitalist polluters, the huge tax “reform” giveaways that redistributed money by taking from the poor and giving to the rich, or the massive expansion of military spending? Was it the funding of Saudi airstrikes against busloads of kids in Yemen?

No, the article either endorses, omits mention of these policies or praises them as Trump’s “accomplishments.” The expansion of the war machine, deregulation and massive tax giveaway to corporate America are highlighted as “bright spots” in the administration.

The problem with Trump, we are told, is that he is “not moored” to Republican principles, ideals and morals:

“The root of the problem is the president’s amorality. Anyone who works with him knows he is not moored to any discernible first principles that guide his decision making.”

Ok, good enough. That sounds right when it comes to Trump—no principles, purely pragmatic and a complete



The author of the *New York Times* op-ed represents the managers of the permanent state apparatus. Art by Liberation News.

hustler. But these are not hidden qualities or unknown personal traits of Trump and were fully on display before our anonymous “resistance” author and his comrades accepted leadership positions within the administration. So it goes deeper than that.

Trump is not trusted by the bourgeoisie to be the top executive to manage their common affairs.

Managing the “common affairs of the bourgeoisie”

The self-described “unsung heroes” from within the administration are most upset that Trump has “little affinity for ideals long espoused by conservatives, including the ‘free market’ and ‘free people.’” These are meaningless or euphemistic code words. There is no such thing as a free market in the era of the rapidly congealing tendencies of monopoly capitalism whereby mega corporations like Amazon and big banks decimate small businesses, as well as the middle and working classes.

The author and his comrades are also mainly upset that Trump wants better or more normal relations with Russia and a peace treaty with North Korea—the only two discernible Trump positions that deviate from the ultra-militarist consensus within the imperialist establishment, and the Pentagon and CIA in particular.

Since Trump became a phenomena in the 2016 election, which was mainly the result of virtually undiluted, free and constant media time given to him by *CNN*, *CBS*, and the capitalist-owned media outlets in the United States (all pursuing a narrow agenda connected to their ratings and advertising money) the Party for Socialism and Liberation has explained that significant sectors of the U.S. ruling class would be pro-

foundly dissatisfied with Trump as the CEO of the government that serves their interests.

Trump is not trusted by the bourgeoisie to be the top executive to manage their common affairs. He neither has the inclination, training or temperament for the task at hand. In fact, his absolute narcissism, hustling and dictatorial style makes him a destabilizing factor for imperialism and the institutions of the U.S.-dominated world order that they have carefully managed for decades. That’s their main beef with Trump.

As early as February 2016 we reminded people of Karl Marx’s incisive generalization in the *Communist Manifesto*: “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” Trump is a destabilizing factor at a time when the big bourgeoisie craves not just profits but stability and are facing, in the words of the Pentagon’s National Security Strategy, an emerging era of “great power competition.”

“The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”

The “steady state”

Trump temporarily overcame the big bourgeoisie’s hostility to him, for a few days, with the bombing of Syria in April 2017. He purchased wider ruling-class appreciation with the gargantuan tax giveaway to the banks, corporations and already wealthy. Grateful as the capitalists are for this redistribution of wealth to the already rich, they are still skeptical of him. It is mainly in coal, oil, steel, aluminum and the weapons industries that Trump retains solid support from some sectors of the

capitalists. He also has considerable support in the white middle class and considerable sectors of white workers.

But the author of the *New York Times* editorial represents the professional class of managers of the permanent state apparatus and they revile Trump. In describing their quiet—and now open—subversion against Trump the author aptly describes who they are and what their mission is in the framework of the capitalist ruling class and its global empire: “This isn’t the work of the so-called deep state. It’s the work of the steady state.”

It’s critically important for socialists who are organizing against Trump’s egregious and reactionary policies not to become the tail to the “steady state,” which at its core is the Pentagon, CIA, NSA, FBI and other instruments of repression. That is the state apparatus of the capitalists and their overt and covert instruments of global domination.

—*Liberation*, September 6, 2018

<https://www.liberationnews.org/socialist-orientation-splits-trump-administration-capitalist-class/>

Chicago 1968

Why the Chicago '68 convention matters today

BY ANDY THAYER

The events around the 1968 Democratic Convention were a sharp turning point in U.S. politics. In full view of news cameras, Mayor Richard J. Daley let his police crack the heads of antiwar protesters in the streets of Chicago, as well as cameramen, other journalists and passersby. Inside the convention, he showed brazen contempt for the popular will by engineering the selection of a pro-war candidate who hadn't won a single primary.

Such blatant contempt for democracy alone would be reason enough to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1968 Democratic Convention. But the lessons to be learned from the events surrounding the 1968 convention and its aftermath are far more profound than that.

For those who wanted wholesale change—from a society of greed and violence to one that values human beings—the Democratic Party's actions were a gut-wrenching teachable moment. For a few years afterwards, the notion that our salvation was to come from the Democratic Party became a laughable proposition among wide layers of people.

Giving up on the major parties, people began looking to their own efforts to win the changes they wanted.

Prior to the Democratic convention, almost no one on the left had any illusions about Richard Nixon, the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination, a man so widely reviled as a far-right opportunist that he was commonly known as "Tricky Dick."

But, with the notable exception of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Democrats were embraced by many Black activists of his generation following the mid-1960s passage of civil rights legislation. And such were the popular hopes of the largely white antiwar movement that

the Democratic Party fielded not one, but three major candidates in the 1968 presidential primaries who claimed to be antiwar, and who between them won 80 percent of the votes.

But these hopes for peaceful change within the system were rudely dashed by events both within and outside of the Chicago '68 convention. The result was one of those rare, brief periods in U.S. history when two factors simultaneously converged: 1) large numbers of people were engaged in social/political issues on a day-to-day basis, and 2) they were profoundly alienated from both major political parties.

...the notion that our salvation was to come from the Democratic Party became a laughable proposition among wide layers of people

This "independence period" brought about one of the broadest and most far-reaching advances in progressive legislation and social advancement seen in U.S. history. The independent spirit of 1968 forced politicians of both parties and the courts to do things they wouldn't have dreamed of doing had the broad movement subordinated itself to the major parties.

A radicalized labor movement frequently ignored its encrusted leadership with wildcat strikes against racism, speedup and victimization of union activists. They threw up independent shop floor organizations in post offices, the Teamsters, the coal mines, and the automobile industry. This was accompanied by a strike wave that resulted in

U.S. workers attaining their high-water mark in real wages in 1974.

Women took the newfound spirit of independence to reject earlier, more conservative generations of movement leadership and, in a direct precursor of today's #metoo movement, developed a mass consciousness about sexual harassment, unequal pay and advancement opportunities on the job. The mass desire to gain control over one's reproductive destiny forced a Nixon-packed, all-male Supreme Court to legalize abortion in 1973.

The "anything is possible" mood led LGBTs to reject the strategies of most earlier movement leaders—consisting mainly of craven, hat-in-hand appeals to politicians and psychological experts to tolerate us. Born out of one of that period's several LGBT riots against police repression, the new movement loudly proclaimed "Gay is Good!," and established the LGBT movement on a mass basis for the first time in U.S. history. The U.S. movement in turn helped inspire movements in countries around the world over the next few decades. Everything LGBTs have won subsequently in law and social attitudes would not have been possible without this earlier, independent movement.

What became the premiere Black Power organization, the Black Panther Party, had less than 100 members in late October 1967. By 1969 its membership had peaked at over 10,000 people. It launched the first sustained, nationwide campaign against police brutality in the North. While it was unsuccessful in making the changes it desired on that front, its free breakfast and community health programs embarrassed the federal government into sweeping action.

For example, between October 1967 and February 1970, the food stamp pro-

gram doubled. By May 1970, it had tripled. By February 1971 it had quintupled. And the president at that time, Richard M. Nixon, was every bit as racist and anti-poor as the current White House occupant. Under that era's Racist-in-Chief, the administration pushed the most far-reaching affirmative action plan of any administration before or since.

While today we've seen the current and past administrations contemplate opening up oil drilling on the eastern seaboard and welcome the Dakota Access Pipeline, back in the day the host of environmental laws currently being dismantled by the Trump administration—the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and the Endangered Species Act—were enacted during the Nixon administration.

A president who had contemplated using nuclear weapons on Vietnam was forced instead to end the U.S. war on the Vietnamese people. The rejection of the legitimacy of both major parties, prompted by the brutal treatment of antiwar protesters outside of the Chicago '68 convention, informed the ultimately successful worldwide antiwar movement. From people in the streets around the globe to U.S. soldiers refusing orders to fight the Vietnamese, the people relied on their own efforts to make change.

For a good decade-and-a-half afterwards, our rulers' fear of the so-called "Vietnam Syndrome" prevented them from invading other countries, such as Angola during the Ford administration. Even when they did start to break the Syndrome, they were so worried about possible popular backlash that they began with pin-prick actions such as Ronald Reagan's invasion of tiny Grenada and George H. W. Bush's invasion of Panama. The Vietnam Syndrome that halted major invasions for several years was thus probably responsible for saving millions of lives.

So as terrifying and awful as the events surrounding the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention were for those

who experienced them, we perversely have much to be thankful for in their effect on subsequent events. When Mayor Daley ordered his police to attack protestors, he undoubtedly thought he was going to "teach them a lesson." Ironically, he did—just not the one he intended. His brutal tactics outside the convention, and the Machine's domineering tactics within, both helped inform and galvanize these independent movements that accomplished so much in the next few years.

A radicalized labor movement frequently ignored its encrusted leadership with wildcat strikes against racism, speedup and victimization of union activists. They threw up independent shop floor organizations in post offices, the Teamsters, the coal mines, and the automobile industry. This was accompanied by a strike wave that resulted in U.S. workers attaining their high-water mark in real wages in 1974.

Apart from 1968 through the early 1970s, the convergence of these two critical factors—mass social engagement and profound disaffection from both political parties—has occurred in the U.S. only twice since World War I: the period 1934-1936, and in the Civil Rights Movement from the late 1950s thru 1965.

While it is outside the scope of this article to discuss how those earlier "independence periods" came about, it

is no accident that each of them saw social movements make the most profound, positive changes in this country's modern era. They brought us the right to form unions, Social Security, an end to legalized apartheid in the U.S., plus a flood of social spending for housing, medical care and jobs.

The empire strikes back

The other side was not going to take the challenges posed by the movements lying down.

Since the early 1970s, forces around the Republican Party have pursued a well-funded campaign of think tanks, extensive media and academic outreach, astro-turf "community" groups, and political campaigns explicitly aimed at rolling back the gains of the late 1960s / early '70s, not to mention the programs won during the Great Depression.

On the Democratic side, in 1972 the antiwar movement was strong enough to take titular control of the Party with the nomination of George McGovern. But all they won was a fetid corpse. Leading Democrats succeeded in sabotaging the McGovern campaign, even though as "good Democrats" they were pledged to support the party's nominee.

It was a far more blatant betrayal by the party's apparatus than putting its fingers on the scales of the 2016 primaries to ensure a Clinton victory. The result was a Nixon victory, which was the biggest electoral landslide in U.S. history until that time—an ironic result given the "mainstream" Democratic Party's current penchant for blaming left third-party formations such as the Greens for their defeats.

To those who looked to the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign to break the stranglehold neoliberalism has on the Democratic Party, the 1972 McGovern campaign should serve as a lesson of what the Party apparatus would have done in the event Sanders had secured the nomination. Since 1972, the Democratic Party has locked down its

nomination rules to prevent another McGovern. It looks set to redouble those efforts ahead of 2020 in response to the threat from the Bernie phenomenon.

More importantly, its main program of defeating the late 1960s/early 1970s movement has been through a program of political incorporation through what's been called the NGO Industrial Complex—grant-making, giving low-paid jobs to young activists in exchange for squelching their political voices, and crowding out genuine grassroots groups through well-funded and staffed non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

At the top, there's been an insidious revolving door between the Party, government bureaucracies, consultancies, think-tanks, academia and the NGOs themselves. These NGOs, when not busy side-tracking or taking credit for the achievements of true grassroots groups, are mainly focused on raising funds to maintain their executive directors' six-figure salaries and expensive offices. They use their pseudo-grassroots legitimacy to amplify Democratic Party talking points, only calling out Republican crimes and thus opening

the Left to the charge of hypocrisy.

The result is that to outsiders, what appears to be “the Left” rarely or never seems to call out Democratic Party politicians by name when they commit the same crimes as Republicans—whether those crimes are the largest deportations in history, escalation of the Afghanistan war, bombings of other countries, or unprecedented attacks on whistleblowers—all features

The mass desire to gain control over one's reproductive destiny forced a Nixon-packed, all-male Supreme Court to legalize abortion in 1973.

of the Obama administration. Much of what considers itself the “hard Left” also mutes its criticisms, or keeps them buried in the little-read pages of their journals and newspapers.

Besides ignoring or excusing the crimes of the Democrats, a prime task

of the “left” NGOs is to make sure that the demands of the movement don't get ahead of what the Party is prepared to accept. Accordingly, following the neo-liberal dictates of their wealthy benefactors, NGO demands are ideally “revenue neutral,” symbolic and cost those benefactors little. The hidden history of the LGBT drive for equal marriage rights is replete with examples of this.

The most cynical and expansive examples of this incorporation strategy were pioneered by Bill Clinton, who was a master of progressive-sounding rhetoric combined with policies that often were to the right of the Republican Party mainstream at the time. So as to keep in touch with their base, the typical Republican Party response then was to move further to the right, with the result that the whole terrain of official U.S. politics moved steadily rightwards during the 1990s into the current century. The Trumpian end-game is not so mysterious when put into this context of long-term neoliberal appeasement.

A more contemporary example of this can be seen in “Obamacare,” which was a virtual carbon copy of Republican Mitt Romney's neo-liberal plan for Massachusetts (preserve-the-market-at-all-costs healthcare provision). Once Obama embraced Romney's neoliberal policies, suddenly the same program was rebranded as “socialist” by the mainstream Republican Party.

Those who control the Democratic Party have shown repeated contempt for a whole series of majoritarian demands, from universal healthcare, to affordable housing, to pulling out the troops (and drones) from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Their strategy is to position themselves two centimeters to the left of the Republicans and say, “We're the best you can get, take it or leave it.” As the Hillary Clinton campaign showed, such a strategy is so uninspiring and insipid that the majority of working-class voters will simply stay home.



Protesters clashed with National Guard members outside the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago in August 1968.

Lessons of the 1968 convention for today

Unfortunately, we cannot simply will “independence periods” into being. Their creation is beyond the powers of even the most powerful groups and individuals.

Short of them, we must organize more modest activities that encourage this same independence among our fellow activists, never serving as the adjunct or cover for either major party as they attempt to lure us with appealing rhetoric. When politicians attempt to take credit for the gains produced by activism—something the Democratic Party routinely does—we must vociferously correct the record. However unpopular, as it frequently was during the Obama years, we must name the names of all politicians who oppose us, regardless of party.

What we need are movements and organizations, in however incipient form, that are truly independent and do not scale their demands to the needs of the Democratic Party.

It will be a huge disservice to the goals we are fighting for if we repeat the history of the 2008 elections, accepting neoliberal policies merely because they are accompanied by nice-sounding rhetoric. We must not allow ourselves to be herded into that camp by breathless fearmongering about “Trump’s fascism” (thus implying that the neoliberal variety is acceptable.)

Trump didn’t get into the White House by his own efforts alone. He was abetted by a failure of eight years of neoliberal Democratic Party rule bailing out the rich while delivering good rhetoric and mostly token programs to the working class, rather than the massive changes that poll after poll shows most Americans want.

Rather than look to the Democratic Party, we need to look to the lessons of the independent movements that have won what reforms we enjoy today, and ultimately overthrow the beast that

continually tries to claw back what gains we have won.

...between October 1967 and February 1970, the food stamp program doubled. By May 1970, it had tripled. By February 1971 it had quintupled. And the president at that time, Richard M. Nixon, was every bit as racist and anti-poor as the current White House occupant. Under that era’s Racist-in-Chief, the administration pushed the most far-reaching affirmative action plan of any administration before or since

The Democratic Party can’t be taken over and reformed, no more than the

state can. This is revolutionary politics 101. As I wrote on the eve of the 2016 Democratic convention in Philadelphia,

“A state which has repeatedly shown the utmost brutality at home and abroad in its two Century existence—committing genocide against Native Americans, mass slavery of African Americans, killing more than three million in Southeast Asia, to name a few examples—will never allow itself to be peacefully taken over by the 99 percent. They’ve launched *coups*, invasions and wholesale massacres over far lesser slights...

“They’d sooner slaughter all opposition rather than respect an election which fundamentally challenged their power and wealth...The idea that the Democratic Party, let alone the state which it serves along with the Republicans, could ever be peacefully captured was an enormous illusion that Bernie supporters will have to put to rest if they want to be part of a genuine revolution.”

—*CounterPunch*, August 21, 2018

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/08/21/why-the-chicago-68-convention-matters-today/>



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Blaming Women for the Sins of Men

BY REBECCA SOLNIT

Editors Note: This was written before the confirmation vote. Kavanaugh, the abuser, is now on the Supreme Court.

We have been here before. We have been here over and over in an endless, Groundhog Day loop about how rape and sexual abuse happen: offering the same explanations, hearing the same kind of stories from wave after wave of survivors, hearing the same excuses and refusals to comprehend from people who are not so sure that women are endowed with inalienable rights and matter as much as men—or, categorically, have as much credibility. We are, with the case of Brett Kavanaugh, Donald Trump’s nominee for the U.S. supreme court, who has been accused of sexual assault, revisiting ground worn down from years of pacing. Kavanaugh denies Christine Blasey Ford’s allegation that he forcibly held her down and assaulted her when both were at high school. We have only the accounts of the participants, and these, it seems, will always contradict each other. The allegation and the denial put us back in a familiar scenario.

The last five years have been an exhaustive and exhausting crash course

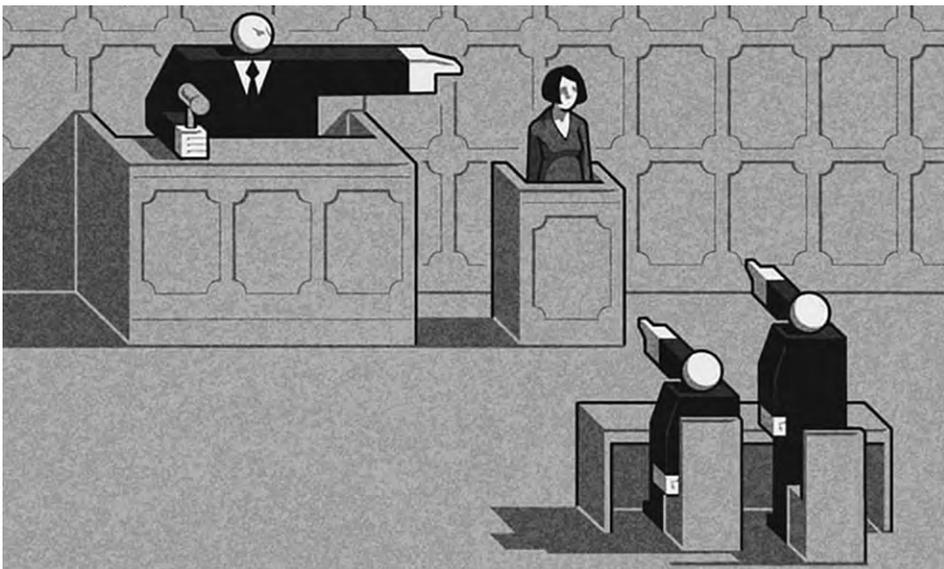
in how abusers and rapists (and attempted rapists) and their victims behave, and how they are perceived and treated, but the learning curve of the willfully oblivious resembles the period at the end of this sentence.

We know why victims don’t report rapes. We know that a minority of rapes are reported; and of those, a small percentage result in arrests; and of those arrests, a small percentage result in prosecutions. Only a very small percentage result in convictions and sentences. We know that the woman who accused the basketball player Kobe Bryant of rape years ago received death threats and extensive character assassination, as did some of Judge Roy Moore’s accusers, one of whom had her house burned down after she spoke up.

We know that women have been portrayed, ever since Eve offered Adam an apple, as temptresses, more responsible for men’s acts than men themselves are, and that various religions still inculcate this view, and in recent times various judges and journalists have acceded to it, even blaming female children for “seducing” their adult abuser.

We know that we—well, some of us—are just beginning to emerge from an era of women being routinely discredited, shamed, blamed, and disbelieved when they speak up about sexual assault. We are, of course, seeing it again with Professor Ford. Her credibility and character were being preemptively attacked even before we knew who she was; she was promptly doxxed¹ when the *Washington Post* revealed her identity. We know why the more than 60 women who say Bill Cosby sexually assaulted them, from the 1960s through recent years, mostly didn’t speak up before 2014, and how those who did were disbelieved and punished while Cosby’s career sailed on. We know why Harvey Weinstein’s alleged victims didn’t speak up, and how a whole apparatus existed—of threats, lawyers, spies—to keep them silent. We know that the teenage victims of the gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar who spoke up were, for the most part, not believed by the school, by the police or even by their parents. We know that a groundswell of feminism made it possible for many women to be heard for the first time, starting last October with the cataclysm of testimony we call #MeToo. Why should we now expect an ordinary schoolgirl to have succeeded where Olympic athletes and Hollywood actors failed to get a hearing or justice?

We have seen this all before. We saw it 27 years ago with the discrediting and harassment of Anita Hill. Hill was called “a little bit nutty and a little bit slutty” for testifying against the supreme court nominee Clarence Thomas, and that one of the ways she was smeared was as a fantasist: “Do you think it a possibility that Professor Hill imagined or fantasized Judge Thomas saying those things she has charged him with?” said Senator Arlen



Specter. “Her story’s too contrived. It’s so slick it doesn’t compute,” said Senator Orrin Hatch, blaming her for being coherent, as he would have undoubtedly done for being incoherent, and then he offered some truly loopy reasons why he thought she fabricated her reluctantly told tale. Some of the same people—notably Hatch—are now gearing up to attack Ford.

We know that the worst things that happen to us can be among the most indelible, so the argument that the accuser can’t possibly remember events from the early 1980s doesn’t hold up. In the late 1990s, I knew a Marine lieutenant colonel who was haunted by the civilian he had, under direct orders from a general, shot during the Korean war more than 40 years before, in circumstances he described in detail to me. A few years ago, a woman in her 60s, moved by the feminist conversation we’re having now, wrote to me in detail of her rape in the 1960s—the first time she had unpacked the trauma she couldn’t escape.

I asked David J Morris, the Marine corps veteran and author of *The Evil Hours*, a powerful book on PTSD, about trauma and memory, and he replied:

“Most men have no idea how truly traumatic sexual assault is. The science on the subject is pretty clear: according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, rape is about four times more likely to result in diagnosable PTSD than combat. Think about that for a moment—being raped is four times more psychologically disturbing than going off to a war and being shot at and blown up. And because there are currently no enduring cultural narratives that allow women to look upon their survival as somehow heroic or honorable, the potential for enduring damage is even greater. A traumatic event like the one Christine Blasey Ford is alleging fractures the self, destroys one’s sense of time and place in the uni-

verse and generally changes a person completely. It is literally an encounter with death. To suggest that she wouldn’t remember it flies in the face of reason. No sane person would suggest that someone wouldn’t remember the time they were in an airplane crash. From a neuroscientific standpoint, being raped is more traumatic than war, not to mention plane crashes.”

Ford reports fearing she might be killed in the conflict.

The science on the subject is pretty clear: according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, rape is about four times more likely to result in diagnosable PTSD than combat.

We know that as a society we hold people responsible for “youthful indiscretions.” The same Republican politicians who have been trying to dismiss an allegation of sexual assault against Kavanaugh as boys-will-be-boys stuff support a president who, in 1989, placed full-page ads in four newspapers calling for the death penalty for the five non-white boys—two of them 15, one 14—falsely convicted of the 1989 Central Park jogger rape and beating. (Donald Trump even asserted they were guilty in 2016, long after their exoneration.) We treat many juveniles accused of crimes as adults, sentence some to life without parole, and saddle them with felony convictions and/or put them on registers of sex offenders for life. We do not excuse them for being drunk or high. The infamous Stanford rapist Brock Turner was 19 when he was arrested for felony sexual assault, banned from the Stanford campus, and given a six-

month sentence and a lifetime on the sex offenders registry.

We know that too many men are full of empathy—for perpetrators, not victims—when stories such as Kavanaugh’s emerge, and that apparently they cannot imagine what it is like to be a woman who has been assaulted, because they’ve never tried. We know that Kavanaugh is not facing punishment for a crime, just consideration of whether he deserves not only a reward, but power over the lives of all Americans. This week in the *Atlantic*, the writer Caitlin Flanagan told of her own near-rape. It was an exceptional story—in that the perpetrator approached her to apologize wholeheartedly when they were both still young. Her story was about an incident in the late 1970s that she remembers with painful clarity—and she says that she believes Professor Ford. I believe in redemption and forgiveness—as things that must come after atonement and transformation.

We know who lies about rape, routinely, regularly: rapists. Criminals tend to deny their crimes. Which doesn’t mean everyone accused is guilty, only that claiming innocence is a habit of the innocent and guilty alike, so it doesn’t tell us much. We know that, on the other hand, false rape accusations are extremely rare (and that they are often lurid stories about recent events, not about a fumbling attempt decades ago.) We know this witness was reluctant to come forward and that she was essentially forced out by the journalists pursuing her after details of her letter emerged. We know multiple people vouch that she told the story long before Kavanaugh’s nomination.

We know there is virtually nothing a straight white man can do to discredit himself, especially if he has elevated status. We routinely see plagiarists, domestic violence perpetrators, liars, thieves, inappropriate masturbators, gropers, and incompetent men put forward as reliable sources and respectable

citizens. Ken Starr took sexual assault very seriously when he let the Whitewater investigation into Bill Clinton veer over into Clinton's sexual misconduct. Yet he overlooked sexual assault when, as president of Baylor University, he was responsible for protecting female students. In 2016 the university fired him after an independent report showed a "fundamental failure" to respond to student sexual assault allegations. Now, on Kavanaugh, Starr is treated as a credible source. He told a news site: "I've known him since 1994. I've worked alongside him—this is so wildly out of character."

We've heard men testify like this before—for example, in 2011, Dominique Strauss-Kahn's pal Bernard-Henri Lévy asserted, "the Strauss-Kahn I know, who has been my friend for 20 years and who will remain my friend, bears no resemblance to this monster" his victim described. Other women came forward to report being sexually assaulted by the monster Lévy had not met. We have been here before.

We are going to go there again, when the case goes to a Senate hearing. Let us proceed to that drama with what we have learned.

Rebecca Solnit is the author of Men Explain Things to Me, and The Mother of All Questions.

—*The Guardian*, September 21, 2018

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/21/brett-kavanaugh-blame-women-anita-hill-cosby-weinstein?CMP=share_btn_fb

¹ Publishing private or identifying information about an individual on the Internet typically with malicious intent.

Growing Up Under Threat

New study reveals Black boys still don't feel safe in the USA

BY GLEN FORD

A new study has rediscovered—or scientifically verified—a very old fact of Black life in the USA: Black boys don't feel safe in white neighborhoods, or in Black neighborhoods that they perceive as poorer than their own Black section of town—in this case, Columbus, Ohio.

Researchers from the Department of Sociology at Ohio State University gave smartphones with GPS tracking to 506 Black youngsters, aged 11 to 17, about evenly divided between the sexes. Five times a day, the kids were asked to report if they felt safe or not in the location they were in. The study found that, the whiter the neighborhood they entered, the less safe Black boys felt, while Black girls registered no decreased sense of safety in whiter surroundings.

Black boys didn't report feeling unsafe in their own neighborhoods, but that doesn't mean they are unaware of the dangers closer to home, according to Christopher Browning, the study's lead author and a professor of sociology researcher at Ohio State. "We are not arguing that growing up in a poor, segregated neighborhood doesn't present challenges," said Browning. "One of the challenges are that those neighborhoods tend to have higher violence."

The story produced the usual commentary about Black parents' practice of schooling their children on how to navigate the geography of racism. The *New York Times* reminded readers that "the study came at a time of widely publicized incidents in which Black children were reported by white people to the police for selling water, mowing the lawn and playing in the yard, selling hot dogs, playing at a pool, and other ordinary activities."

The overarching truth documented by the survey is that young Black males know they are targeted for harm by whites, and that Black people in other neighborhoods need watching, too.

The sociologists' report said nothing about how the police factor into young Black male's fears, although this cohort is well aware that they are the special prey of the boys and girls in blue, of all races. The researchers think Black youth anxieties about traveling in whiter places could have consequences for their health—a logical conclusion.

A June 27 article in *CityLab*, titled "Police Killings and Violence are Driving Black People Crazy," calls attention to two recent studies. The first, on "Police Killings and their Spillover Effects on the Mental Health of Black Americans," by researchers for Harvard and Boston University, found that Black Americans reported experiencing poor mental health days in the months after hearing about police killings of unarmed Blacks. Whites reported no similar reactions to such killings.

The other study, "Neighborhood Violence, Peer-Effects, and Academic Achievement in Chicago," by Johns Hopkins University researchers, found that students in areas of intensive policing do badly on tests, whether they have witnessed violent crimes or not. Researcher Julia Burdick-Will concluded: "Trauma is not necessarily directly related to having witnessed a crime, but it's also related to living in a neighborhood where there is intense policing."

The long arm of white supremacist law enforcement mangles even those young Black lives that it does not physically pummel, imprison and kill—just as it did their parents, grandparents and ancestors through the centuries on this continent.

No more studies are necessary to prove that Black folks need to get FREE. The permutations of oppression are endless. White hostility is as intractable as ever. The system that made things that way—born half-a-millennium ago with European colonialism, whose pillage of the planet spawned capitalism—has no further use for the Black ghetto, except to disperse and imprison it, a reality sensed by the young people tracked by researchers in Columbus, Ohio.

The Lords of Capital that run the system—or rather, who claim most of the wealth that chaotic capitalism drains from human labor—want to push young Black males, and their less anxious sisters, and the very fearful mothers that bore them, out of the city, to who-knows-where. The communications mouthpieces of capital, like the *New York Times*, preach “diversity” while their owners unleash a fury of ethic cleansing. “Diversity” is apparently waiting at the Black family’s next destination, somewhere in the amenity-less inner suburbs. SWAT teams have prepared a welcome.

Police violence is the capitalist’s blunt weapon of social control. Against Black people, it is deployed with near-ceremonial cruelty, as a political statement—one that is welcomed by many whites. It is intended as a daily reminder to Blacks, especially the young males,

**Yearning to be free
of oppression is not a
psychological problem:
it is a human condition.**

that they are not free. Since the Harlem rebellion of 1935, Black youth, and many older folks of both sexes, have answered police insults to their humanity with counter-violence. In the Sixties, the Black response to oppression developed an exquisite vocabulary that spoke to liberation, which still echoes. It was heard again in Los Angeles in 1992, and in Ferguson in 2014, and in Baltimore just a few months later. Yearning to be free of oppression is not a psychological problem: it is a human condition.

The oppressor is the problem, and his very existence is maddening to the oppressed. Every study that measures the enhanced anxiety of Black tweens that find themselves on a strange corner, or that shows Black mothers die after birth at three times the rate of whites, is an indictment of the white men at the top of the capitalist pyramid—as both racial and economic (class) oppressors.

But, to get to Jeff Bezos and his ilk, you’ve got to go through the police—who have been coming for you, if you’re Black, since you were smaller than Tamir Rice.

—*Black Agenda Report*, August 16, 2018

<http://app.getresponse.com/click.html?x=a62b&lc=BRg7XT&mc=IV&s=FLdQF1&u=BjGPz&y=s&>



Despair Amidst Insecure Economic Recovery

BY DAVID ROSEN

It's now almost a decade since the last fiscal crisis, launching what was dubbed the "Great Recession." It wreaked havoc on the U.S. banking system and the housing market, leaving millions of Americans in desperate free-fall. While many conventional economic indicators suggest that the economy has rebounded, a significant portion of the American public feel stuck, their futures looking bleak.

On August 6th, President Trump tweeted, "Great financial numbers being announced on an almost daily basis. Economy has never been better, jobs at best point in history." So, with such good news, why do an increasing number of Americans feel un-well?

Two recent studies point to the deepening despair shared by many Americans and unacknowledged by Trump and the mainstream media. The Federal Reserve study, "Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2017," and the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index detail this despair in complemen-

tary ways. Taken together, they paint a disturbing picture of the suffering being endured by Americans, especially the nation's most vulnerable.

While Trump seeks to dismiss all challenges to his empty bluster as "fake news," there is a growing perception among Americans that the once proudly proclaimed "American Dream" is over. This perception is shared by critics of capitalism and some mainstream pundits as well as (incoherently) by those who back Trump and his call to "make America great again"—with its emphasis on "again," a wish for what was once but nevermore.

The Federal Reserve report champions the slow economic recovery that's marked the decade following the Great Recession. It notes that "fewer people are finding it difficult to get by, or just getting by, than was the case five years ago. ... This decline in financial hardship is consistent with the decline in the national unemployment rate over this period."

However, it warns two in five Americans don't have enough savings

to cover a \$400 emergency expense, and one in four don't feel they are 'at least doing OK' financially." It adds, "more than one in five said they weren't able to pay the current month's bills in full, and more than one in four said they skipped necessary medical care last year because they couldn't afford it." These are signs of the decline in well-being.

The Gallup-Sharecare study was initiated in 2008 to gauge the overall well-being of adult Americans. It's a comprehensive poll involving interviews with more than 160,000 adults from all 50 states. Its most recent 2017 survey found that between 2016 and 2017, the overall well-being score dropped 0.6 points, to 61.5 from 62.1. As Gallup declares, "this decline is both statistically significant and meaningfully large."

The Gallup-Sharecare study identifies a range of factors that make up its "well-being metrics," including: experiencing significant worry, "little interest or pleasure in doing things," clinical diagnoses of depression, daily physical pain, a decline in having "someone who encourages you to be healthy" and dissatisfaction with one's standard of living (compared to peers.) Other symptoms of decline in well-being include unmanageable debt as well as increased obesity, drug addiction (e.g., opioids) and alcoholism.

Both the Fed and Gallup-Sharecare studies identify those suffering the greatest loss of well-being. The Gallup-Sharecare study notes: "Women have had a substantial 1.1-point drop in their Well-Being Index score, while the score for men is unchanged."

The Fed adds: "Across the four major racial and ethnic groups, well-being has dropped the most among Blacks and Hispanics, although it has also come down to a lesser degree among whites and Asians." And it warns: "Americans living in lower-income households saw a significant



drop in well-being, while their higher-income counterparts saw a smaller decrease, no change or a slight increase.”

The Fed furthers this perception, arguing, “The overall positive trend in self-reported well-being masks some notable differences across groups.” Adding, “More education is associated with greater economic well-being; however, at each education level, Blacks and Hispanics are worse off than whites.”

Most revealing, the Fed finds that “whites with only a high school degree are more likely to report doing okay financially than Blacks or Hispanics with some college education or an associate degree.” It concludes, “this pattern, combined with the fact that Blacks and Hispanics typically have completed less education, results in substantially lower overall economic well-being for Black and Hispanic adults.”

Gallup-Sharecare report makes sadly clear that many of those experiencing the decline in their sense of well-being are supporters of Trump and the Republicans. Some 21 states witnessed significant declines in their relative well-being, including many “red” states strongly supportive of Trump. Among those suffering the largest declines in the ostensible well-being are Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and West Virginia; West Virginia had the lowest level of well-being.

Not asked by either the Fed or Gallup-Sharecare studies was what are the consequences of the loss of well-being? In particular, whether the decline in well-being breeds rage, a deeply-personal sense of revenge toward those who ostensibly ended their American Dream?

David Rosen is the author of Sex, Sin and Subversion: The Transformation of 1950s New York’s Forbidden into America’s New Normal (Skyhorse, 2015).

—CounterPunch, August 21, 2018

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/08/31/trumps-fake-boom-growing-despair-amidst-insecure-economic-recovery/>

Zero Tolerance

Child separation trauma continues

BY DEBBIE NATHAN

On August 9, several reporters took a government-led tour through America’s largest detention facility for immigrant parents and their children: the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas. Sprawling over 50 acres of a repurposed oilfield workers’ camp, Dilley, as the center is colloquially known, has room for 2,400 detainees. It currently holds about 1,500 people—all mothers and their children, including babies.

No interviews with the detainees were allowed, so reporters were left to record random sounds and observations: phalanxes of baby strollers, a salad bar in the cafeteria, and, as the *Wall Street Journal* noted, “a speaker blasting a Jimmy Buffett song.” But *The Intercept* has been in contact with some of the occupants of Dilley by phone—many of them children—and the circumstances they’re enduring are decidedly less sanguine than Buffett’s tunes.

Ninety percent of Dilley detainees were apprehended after President Donald Trump’s “zero tolerance” family separation policy was rescinded on June 20, and they never experienced

family separations. These days, detained families are typically freed after two weeks to join friends and relatives elsewhere in the U.S. who’ve agreed to sponsor them.

But for the unlucky ten percent, the fallout from Trump’s policy is ongoing.

Under the “zero tolerance” policy, all adults who entered the United States illegally were prosecuted. The effect of that policy was to separate children from their detained parents and place them with relatives, foster homes, or shelters.

In June, Trump responded to public pressure and ended the policy. Shortly thereafter, a federal judge in California ordered immigration authorities to reunite families within 30 days.

But the “zero tolerance” families at Dilley are still caught in a peculiar bind: Under the law, children can stay in detention for no more than 20 days. But federal judges in California resolved that if parents contest their deportation orders, the families can be held indefinitely. As a result, some families have



South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas—America’s largest detention facility—Is privately owned by CoreCivic, formally known as Corrections Corporation of America.

been locked up for weeks: They're no longer separated, but not free, either.

Daniel Bible, a field office director for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's San Antonio sector, told the *Associated Press* that the formerly separated children and their parents were not "showing signs of trauma that would set them apart from other families being held." But several "zero tolerance" policy survivors have called *The Intercept* during the past weeks and described feeling desperately unhappy and emotionally damaged. According to medical experts, all children who were separated from their parents under the "zero tolerance" policy are at increased risk of developing long-term health problems from "toxic stress." But for the children who continue to be confined, the damage is still accumulating.

One call I received was from a ten-year-old girl. In a weary voice, she told me, in Spanish, that she is afraid to attend the school that Dilley maintains for child detainees. "I'm afraid to leave my mom and go to class," she said. "I'm afraid that's when they'll separate me again from my mom, like at the dog pound." "She cries in the morning," her mother said.

The girl has told immigration attorneys at Dilley that "bad people" in

Honduras injured her mother and threatened her—in part because the family is Mormon. She said that when she and her mother crossed the border into South Texas in early June, Customs and Border Protection separated them and put the girl in the cage-like "dog pound" room. They told her she and her mother would be reunited in two days. In reality, it took almost five weeks.

After the separation, officials told the child she was being flown to New York to see her mother, even though her mother was in detention in South Texas. The child was put in a shelter in New York for 32 days.

Now, back in Dilley, she is hyper aware of the government's desire to deport them both.

"If we leave them just for a minute they start crying," said another mother, also in a phone call. "They don't even want to see us signing a paper because they're afraid it's about deportation. 'Mami, no te vayas!' they say. They're terrified."

Some children told me that they dislike school at Dilley because within a few days of befriending classmates from families who weren't subjected to Trump's "zero tolerance" policy, those children are released from detention. "They come and then they go, you don't

know where to. You don't know why they get to go, but you have to stay," said a 12-year-old girl. "It makes you feel hopeless," said a 16-year-old boy.

Some departures have been even more dramatic. On August 9, for instance, during a hearing appealing her deportation decision in Washington D.C., a Salvadoran woman and her young daughter were taken from Dilley and put onto an ICE plane bound for the country the two had fled. They were *en route* to El Salvador when the judge overseeing the hearing found out about the deportation and angrily ordered the plane to be turned around. Today, they're still at Dilley, and their presence has been a constant reminder of the capricious nature of the system.

Susan Henner, an immigration lawyer from White Plains, New York, says that her Guatemalan client at Dilley, a woman named Mirza, was also put onto a plane with her young son and deported at the behest of the Dilley court. This happened even though a court in Arizona, where Mirza first entered the system, had just granted the woman permission to remain in the U.S. for a hearing scheduled for October. Henner did not learn of Mirza and her son's sudden exit until several days after it happened. By then, mother and child were long gone, and Henner hasn't been able to track them. The story of their deportation has lingered at Dilley, providing grist for the anxiety mill.

While caged in the "dog pound," and throughout their stays in shelters around the country, some of the separated children were issued Notices to Appear—mandates to show up in immigration court and tell a judge why they fear returning to their countries. The children whom *The Intercept* spoke with have plenty of reasons.

The ten-year-old fears religious persecution. The 12-year-old Honduran told her lawyer that a gang threatened to kill her, and that she was abused by her father, who also threatened her life. But



Children Protesting U.S. Immigration Policy.

the children were not given an opportunity to convey these fears to immigration authorities via “credible fear” interviews, which, under normal circumstances, would start the asylum process.

Moreover, their parents were offered a coercive “choice” after the “zero tolerance” policy ended: reunite with your children “for the purpose of repatriation,” or return to your home country without your children. If the parents chose the second option, their kids would still have a shot at asylum. But leaving their children behind in a foreign land without parents to guide them through the asylum process didn’t seem like a real “choice” to many parents, who signed waivers agreeing to be reunited with their children and deported.

Now, apparently on the basis of those waivers, the government has revoked the children’s Notices of Appearance, or declined to file them all together. As a result, they’ve effectively been denied access to the asylum process.

A lawsuit filed in late July by several parents detained at Dilley and Karnes, another Texas facility, on behalf of their detained children, alleges that these minors have been denied their constitutional right to seek asylum. Both the ten-year-old Mormon and the 12-year-old are named plaintiffs.

The complaint argues that, for the children to make their best case, they need their parents to remain in the U.S., where they can help them to gather the details about the violence against them in their home countries. As the suit argues, the children “have a right to be accompanied by their parents” during the asylum claims process. Therefore, parents can’t be deported during that time.

The complaint further argues that the adults deserve new credible-fear interviews. “All of the plaintiffs’ parents were suffering from emotional distress” during their original interviews, reads a declaration by Shaylyn

Fluharty, Managing Attorney of the Dilley Pro Bono Project. She represents the Dilley children named in the lawsuit. The parents’ anxiety about their separated children made it “nearly impossible for them to focus on anything other than the location and well-being of their children,” according to another declaration, by Manoj Govindaiah from The Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services or “RAICES,” who represents children at Karnes.

The lawsuit also argues that, under the Immigration and Nationality Act, all the family members of children who pass their interviews should be eligible for asylum—even parents who’ve already received negative findings.

The government feels differently, responding that the undocumented parents voluntarily signed deportation waivers, and that they have the right to make such decisions for their children.

On Thursday, *The Intercept* learned from a detained mother that ICE offi-

cial had convened a meeting for mothers who were formerly separated from their children. The mothers were apparently told that they and their kids would be released next week. But attorney Justin Bernick of Hogan Lovells, who is representing the children, says that he doesn’t know yet whether that information is accurate. “We’ve heard this, too, from folks on the ground,” he said, “but we have no confirmation from the government that it’s actually going to happen. And we’ve seen many instances of misinformation” from the government, Bernick said. (ICE Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Rodriguez told *The Intercept* that ICE cannot comment “due to pending litigation.”)

The families are now cautiously hopeful, but still wary. Until they know more, all they can do is wait.

—*The Intercept*, August 26, 2018

<https://theintercept.com/2018/08/26/children-separated-under-trumps-zero-tolerance-policy-say-their-trauma-continues/>



Taxi Drivers' Victory

Meet the militant taxi drivers union that just defeated corporate giants, Uber and Lyft

CHRIS BROOKS INTERVIEW WITH BHAIRAVI DESAI

The New York Taxi Workers Alliance knows how to throw a punch.

On August 14, 2018, the scrappy but militant 21,000 member union representing taxi and for-hire vehicle drivers in New York City won a landmark legislative victory establishing the country's first cap on ride-sharing company vehicles and essentially forcing them to pay their drivers a minimum wage.

This fight pitted the Taxi Workers Alliance against corporate giants Uber and Lyft, which together employ more lobbyists than Amazon, Walmart and Microsoft combined.

Uber alone spent \$1 million between January and June of this year trying to put the brakes on the Taxi Workers Alliance's efforts.

There is little wonder why. New York City is Uber's largest U.S. market and the number of Uber and Lyft vehicles on the streets have exploded in recent years, from 25,000 in 2015 to 80,000 in 2018.

Since neither Uber nor Lyft considers their drivers to be employees—instead classifying them as “independent contractors”—both companies have avoided paying social security and payroll taxes while stripping their drivers of minimum wage and overtime protections as well as the right to organize a union and collectively bargain a contract. A city-commissioned study found that 85 percent of New York app-based drivers are earning below the minimum wage.

The companies have also made life miserable for many taxi drivers. As the number of Uber and Lyft vehicles has risen, the value of taxi medallions has plummeted. Once a prized asset for aspiring working-class families, medal-

lions that once sold for \$1 million are today selling for \$200,000.

Driven to despair by unregulated corporate growth, six New York City drivers have taken their lives in recent months: Abdul Saleh, Yu Mein Kenny Chow, Nicano Ochisor, Danilo Corporan Castillo, Alfredo Perez and Douglas Schifter.

I spoke with New York Taxi Workers Alliance Executive Director Bhairavi Desai directly following the City Council vote to discuss their victory and what this new legislation means for drivers.

Chris Brooks: New York City is the first to put a cap on for-hire vehicles, can you talk about what this legislation does and why it is so important?

Bhairavi Desai: This legislation places a cap on for-hire vehicles for up to a year. That means no new vehicle licenses will be issued for Uber and Lyft, putting an end to the unchecked growth of these companies in New York City. There will be a pretty intense study undertaken by the city over the course of the next year. At the end of the year, the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) will be authorized to pass regulation.

Chris Brooks: What kind of permanent regulation would you hope comes from this?

Bhairavi Desai: It's hard to say right now, but the TLC could place a permanent limit on the number of for-hire vehicles on the road. It's going to be important that we settle on a permanent cap on for-hire vehicles that makes sense for everyone—one that lets everybody making a living, that stops the current race to the bottom, and that not only lifts standards for app drivers but all drivers across the industry.

Chris Brooks: It seems like part of what gave the city council a sense of urgency was the fact that six drivers committed suicide. Do you think that's fair and do you think this cap could save lives?

Bhairavi Desai: You can't look at Uber and Lyft in a vacuum. Part of what's happened over the past three years is that taxi drivers have been made to feel invisible. The six drivers who committed suicide were yellow cab, livery and black car drivers. Part of what drove them to despair was this feeling that the deterioration of their livelihoods was not visible to policy makers or the community.

One of the drivers who committed suicide, Douglas Schifter, has written one of the most important critiques of the gig economy. It was his suicide note. Doug killed himself in front of City Hall after writing a powerful note describing how the flood of for-hire cars left desperate drivers scrambling to make enough money to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. His story humanized this struggle.

Over the past three years, Uber and Lyft have presented themselves as socially conscious corporations while they have been rendering drivers invisible. That's obviously intentional, since they want automation in the long run. One of the most important progresses we made is putting the drivers back in front—as the visible face of their industry and in the organizing campaigns to regulate these companies.

We've also been putting together a mental health program. When drivers see our flyers, they see that the Taxi Workers Alliance is fighting for change in the industry and that they're not alone. But we also provide information on bankruptcy and a suicide hotline on

every flyer. No union should have to organize under those conditions. This has been such a spiritually enlightening campaign.

Chris Brooks: What do you mean by that?

Bhairavi Desai: Watching families who lost their loved ones to suicide, it's such a personal grief and given that suicide is something that most people are socialized to keep private, these families have taken their darkest hour, shared it publicly, and stood strong the entire time.

I grew up poor so I don't take for granted the economic struggles that we as a movement wage to keep food on the table. But when you're on a campaign that is literally about creating hope so members stay alive, then failure is never going to be an option.

Chris Brooks: The Taxi Workers Alliance was also responsible for passing the first legislation to establish regulation of minimum rate of payment to App drivers, right?

Bhairavi Desai: That's right. We not only placed a cap on app-based for-hire vehicles, but we established the first minimum pay requirement for those App drivers. That means, the companies can't keep lowering the rates by which they pay drivers and in establishing those rates through rule-making, the Taxi and Limousine Commission will consider drivers' expenses and their right to earn a livable income post-expenses.

The original version of the bill locked in App drivers at the state's minimum wage and that floor was the ceiling, so we fought for broader language so drivers could earn more as the companies rake in more revenue from passenger fares. Our long-term goal is to win a regulated commission system where drivers could earn, for example, 80 percent of the fare.

The same bill also authorizes the TLC to regulate the App passenger fare at the

end of the 12-month study. As long as the passenger fare remains unregulated, the companies can keep dropping the rates, locking out drivers in the competitor sectors from getting a raise, as taxi and livery drivers would be too afraid that Uber and Lyft would just lower rates if their rates ever went up. We fought for all drivers to get a raise and won legislation to make that possible.

The City Council has also introduced a bill to require a study on the issue of debt and bankruptcies facing medallion owner-drivers, and to make recommendations for council action, including ways to finance a fund or lower interest rates. All of these economic demands were in our platform.

Chris Brooks: On top of the enormous legislative victories in the New York City Council, the Taxi Workers Alliance also just won an important victory at the New York State Unemployment Insurance Appeal Board, which ruled that Uber drivers are employees, not independent contractors. Can you talk about this ruling?

Bhairavi Desai: We've beat Uber and Lyft in labor court and we've beat them at City Hall. These are some of the highest valued companies in the world. They get obscene amounts of money from Wall Street. So many in the labor world said you can't organize these workers and you can't beat back these companies, but here we are, a motley crew, a grassroots, worker-led movement and we defeated them because we never gave up. We refuse to make compromises.

The unemployment decision is so significant because, up to now, these companies could oversaturate the streets with drivers and face no consequences. Since Uber claimed that drivers were "independent contractors," the company didn't have to pay into unemployment insurance and drivers weren't presumed to be eligible for it.

If Uber and Lyft had to contribute to unemployment insurance and all

the drivers that couldn't make ends meet were receiving unemployment, then that would have been a major disincentive for the profit strategy that both companies have pursued. It's easy for them to glut the market with drivers because they aren't employees of Uber. Otherwise they'd have to pay taxes for them, and they'd be on the hook for them.

Misclassification, oversaturation and deregulation of the fares are at the heart of Uber and Lyft's business model and are the main causes of the impoverishment of drivers.

Chris Brooks: What has been the response from the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG), which is funded by Uber and would be an illegal company-dominated union if Uber drivers were ruled to be employees?

Bhairavi Desai: They have been team Uber. When they saw we were going to win on the cap, they turned around and said "we support that." But meanwhile, they've been saying they want the city council momentum to end. Until a couple weeks ago, they were saying all that should be done is a minimum wage requirement set by the TLC.

Chris Brooks: So they were initially opposing the cap?

Bhairavi Desai: They were opposing the cap. They had their great John Kerry moment. They were against it before they were in favor of it. Well, I guess he was the flip of that.

Chris Brooks: Uber has responded to the Taxi Workers Alliance's efforts by launching a seven-figure public relations campaign highlighting many of the legitimate grievances felt in Black communities about driver bias and being denied rides. Uber also had the support of prominent leaders of color, like Al Sharpton and Spike Lee, who stumped for them against the cap. How do you respond to these criticisms and what is the plan for addressing them?

Bhairavi Desai: This time around, people really saw the opportunistic way in which Uber was trying to advance their corporate agenda by dividing a workforce mostly of immigrants of color from the African-American community and creating this narrative that civil rights and economic justice for workers are somehow not interrelated.

We were able to break through Uber's ploy because we had many council members of color who we had several conversations with over the course of many months and we put together a nine-point civil rights initiative where point nine was, we didn't call it an office of inclusion, but an office at the TLC that would oversee this program that included training, continuing licensing requirements, a renewal course, community service as well as development of the technology for electronic hailing of yellow cabs.

Chris Brooks: An emphasis on civil rights was evident in both the coalition behind the legislation passed in New York City and the legislation itself. The Taxis for All coalition, which includes

numerous disability rights groups, was out in force at rallies. And the legislative cap on for-hire vehicles specifically exempts vehicles with wheelchair accessibility. So it could be argued that this is not really a cap, but a regulation that is forcing the industry to become more accessible.

A city-commissioned study found that 85 percent of New York app-based drivers are earning below the minimum wage.

Bhairavi Desai: The Taxis for All Campaign, they're amazing. We've been in partnership with them for over ten years. We worked with them to bring a mandate that 50 percent of yellow cabs be wheelchair accessible by the year 2020. So they've been supporting this campaign all along and they are remarkable people.

We are one of the few global cities that doesn't have the level of accessible service that it should. Uber and Lyft fight accessibility passionately across the country, not just wheelchair accessibility, but signage requirements, because taxis have to meet a braille signage requirement.

I don't want to overstate their commitment to it, but I do think that accessibility is something that the City Council has acknowledged to be a standard that App companies should be required to meet. Of course, the App companies have fought that standard and they used the Independent Drivers Guild (IDG) do it. The IDG said they were against the TLC's accessibility mandate because that would make costs go up for drivers. But why not fight your employer so that they have to absorb some of those expenses? Why is it a given that the IDG assumes all expenses have to fall on drivers?

In the taxi industry, drivers were found to be independent contractors and so we've focused on TLC-level regulation. Since 1997, we've won caps on all the different expenses that drivers have to pay. In 2012, we won caps on the financing expenses that drivers pay on vehicles. We didn't just assume that drivers have to eat these costs.

These victories are made possible because we believe in worker organizing across our industry. We don't let employers define the limits of what is possible. We organize to make new gains possible.

Since day one, we have refused to believe that Uber and Lyft couldn't be brought under control because we were able to change an entrenched medallion industry. If we were able to make changes there, why wouldn't we be able to do it with these companies?

Chris Brooks: It's still stunning to think that a 21,000 member union has taken on a \$70 billion corporation in New York City.



New York taxi drivers have won the country's first cap on ride-sharing company vehicles.

Bhairavi Desai: Since November, we've had over 20 actions. We didn't even send our first letter to City Council until April. They saw our fight and on our demonstration posters, they saw our platform. The 11-point council package comes directly out of our demands list, including first-time regulations against predatory lending in the for-hire industry, similar to protections we won in the taxi industry, and a health and benefits fund for all drivers across the industry. We've been hitting the streets because we knew this was going to be a public fight.

These men and women, when they take time off work, they lose income. When you're a yellow cab driver, you're paying a lot of expenses. When you're an App driver, you're paying a lot of expenses. And time you aren't working is time you are losing income. Yet our members turned out to action after action with their families. We won because of our commitment.

Chris Brooks is a staff writer and organizer with Labor Notes.

—*In These Times*, August 15, 2018

http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/21386/militant_taxi_drivers_union_uber_lyft_alliance_new_york_city

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South African Conspiracy Theory

With South African conspiracy theory, Trump is becoming Dylann Roof

BY JUAN COLE

Ann Arbor (*Informed Comment*)—White nationalist terrorist Dylann Roof, who murdered nine African-Americans in a church, including a sitting state senator, confessed himself deeply disturbed by various white grievances. Before murdering his hosts, he accused them of “taking over our country” and “raping our women.”

He wrote in his manifesto,

“From this point I researched deeper and found out what was happening in Europe. I saw that the same things were happening in England and France, and in all the other Western European countries. Again I found myself in disbelief. As an American we are taught to accept living in the melting pot, and Black and other minorities have just as much right to be here as we do, since we are all immigrants. But Europe is the homeland of White people, and in many ways the situation is even worse there. From here I found out about

the Jewish problem and other issues facing our race, and I can say today that I am completely racially aware.”

But it didn't stop there. Benjamin Foldy explained in these pages regarding Roof's *Facebook* profile photo: “In the picture, Roof sports two flag patches on his left breast: the apartheid-era flag of South Africa and the flag of white Rhodesia, the colonial predecessor to current day Zimbabwe.”

A hysteria around the end of white colonial rule in southern Africa has afflicted the American far right for decades. Recently the allegation in neo-Nazi circles has been that white farmers in South Africa are being genocided.

This damned lie, picked up by right wing commentators like Ann Coulter and by Rupert Murdoch's phony news outlets like *Fox*, is going mainstream via Trump, who has asked Mike Pompeo at the State Department to look into the ongoing mass murder.



Dylan Roof sports two flag patches on his left breast in the photo: the apartheid-era flag of South Africa and the flag of white Rhodesia, the colonial predecessor to current day Zimbabwe.

About 8.4 percent of South Africa's population identifies as white. It has fallen from 8.6 percent in 2010. The South African population is 57 million so self-identified whites (mostly Afrikaners) are a little less than five million. The reduction in numbers of two tenths of a percent is owing to emigration, not genocide.

Despite their small percentage of the population, whites had 85 percent of the country's farmland in 1990, and most finance and industrial capital was in their hands. That wasn't natural, but a social and military/police artifact of colonialism and then from the late 1940s, of Apartheid or racial separation and dominance.

...whites had 85 percent of the country's farmland in 1990, and most finance and industrial capital was in their hands

White ownership of agricultural lands nationally has fallen ten percent, to 73.3 percent (remember, they are eight percent of the population.) A great deal of the transfer of land to Black Africans has come about through Black families purchasing it from whites for farming purposes (five million hectares) or for non-farming purposes (1.7 million hectares.) The government program of buying land to distribute to Blacks has only transferred two million hectares to them. This is an important finding to underline. Most of the decrease in white ownership of farmland has come about because Black Africans bought it from them, now that they are able to.

South Africa's *News24* estimates, "In three of the most fertile provinces—Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo—more than 50 percent of

agricultural potential is in Black hands." So progress is being made in redressing the wrongs of the past, and Americans of all people should be happy that the market seems to be playing a central role in this rectification.

There were only 74 farm murders in 2016-17, out of 19,000 murders nationally. While that is up from 58 in the previous year, the numbers are so small as to make it absurd to speak in Trump's exaggerated terms. Moreover, the victims are not reported by race, and many farm workers are Black, so it is impossible to know how many of the 74 victims were white. *BBC* fact-checking finds that there is no reason to think that white farmers are murdered at higher rates than anyone else in South Africa, and some reason to think that the murder rate for whites is substantially lower than the national average.

South Africa's post-Apartheid government has moved with glacial slowness in taking up the controversial issue of land reform, which it is now pursuing. So far post-Apartheid South Africa has managed its race relations without falling into the Iraq disease of ethnic reprisals. There are many discontents, of course. But I noticed when I was there that in the fast food restaurants of Johannesburg, you often saw racially mixed groups of youth at the tables, something that is rarer in the U.S. (except maybe in California.) And I heard Bantu speakers saying that they wanted to learn Afrikaans. The Soweto riots of 1976 had begun as a protest against a switch in schooling from English to Afrikaans.

The only people who think there is a genocide against white farmers in South Africa are the neo-Nazis that influenced Dylann Roof to commit his own small genocide.

To have a Dylann Roof foreign policy imposed on the Department of State by Trump, whose father was once arrested at a Ku Klux Klan disturbance in New York, is beyond shameful.

It should be remembered that Nazi Germany itself sought close relations with segregated South Africa in the 1930s on the grounds that there was a global groundswell of colored people and that the white nations had to stand together against it.

Washington is understandably consumed by the revelations about hush money and election interference, but the Nazification of U.S. foreign policy should be front-page news.

—*Informed Comment*, August 24, 2018

<https://www.juancole.com/2018/08/africa-conspiracy-becoming.html>

To have a Dylann Roof foreign policy imposed on the Department of State by Trump, whose father was once arrested at a Ku Klux Klan disturbance in New York, is beyond shameful.

Cameroon Atrocities

New video shows more atrocities by Cameroon, a key U.S. ally in drone warfare

BY NICK TURSE

Gunshots ring out as the troops advance down a dirt road. One of them, in full combat gear—helmet, camouflage uniform, automatic weapon—clowns for the camera and sticks out his tongue. A sergeant next to him says, in French, “This is a kamikaze mission!”

It quickly becomes clear exactly what type of mission this actually is. It’s of the same type that soldiers carried out at El Mozote, El Salvador, in 1981, at My Lai, South Vietnam, in 1968, and at Oradour-sur-Glane, France, in 1944. It is a massacre. And it is filmed. This particular mass killing takes place in Cameroon, a key U.S. ally and staging ground for America’s drone operations in Africa. While the number of victims is likely smaller than other notorious mass killings, it’s the second atrocity video involving Cameroon’s armed forces to be made public this summer.¹

“Lay down, lay down. Put your head there,” a soldier shouts at about 12 unresisting people who are seated or lying on the ground. Around the one-minute-and-44-second-mark in the footage, troops aim at the group and fire with their assault rifles for an extended period of time.

“There are some who are not dead,” says one of the soldiers when the shooting subsides. “The dudes still move. They move,” says another.

A soldier then walks forward and fires at close range. Bodies jerk from the impact of the bullets. A voice then calls out, “It’s not us. It’s Yaounde”—the capital of the country, and an apparent reference to the national government.

“This shocking video shows armed men lining people up face down or sitting against a wall and shooting them with automatic weapons,” said Ilaria Allegrozzi, Amnesty International’s

Lake Chad researcher. “A second round of shooting ensures no survivors. Here is yet more credible evidence to support the allegations that Cameroon’s armed forces have committed grave crimes against civilians, and we are calling for an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation. Those suspected to be responsible for these abhorrent acts must be brought to justice.”

Other news organizations have released censored versions of the video that do not show the killings. *The Intercept* is publishing a version that includes the massacre, and has an English translation. With the U.S. government—which has close ties with Cameroon’s armed forces and operates a drone base in the north of the country—offering little indication that it is seriously investigating the atrocity or reconsidering its military aid to the country, it is in the public interest to make the uncensored footage available.

Amnesty International investigation

An investigation by Amnesty International, using digital analysis of the video footage that began circulating online, found that the mass killing of at least a dozen unarmed people took place during a Cameroonian military operation in the village of Achigachiya in the Far North region sometime prior to May 2016. An earlier Amnesty International report documented the extrajudicial executions of at least 30 civilians, including many elderly people, in the same village in January 2015. Local sources say as many as 88 people were killed. While much remains uncertain, the Cameroonian military operation in Achigachiya was apparently part of a mission to recover the bodies of fellow soldiers killed when Boko Haram militants overran a nearby Cameroonian military base in late

December 2014. The attack on civilians was likely an act of retribution for perceived local assistance to the insurgents. The video appears to be footage of that 2015 operation.

An Islamist insurgent group with roots in Nigeria, Boko Haram has waged a campaign of violence that spilled across the borders of several Lake Chad Basin countries, including Cameroon. Known for attacks on schools, the burning of villages, and large-scale abductions—including nearly 300 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok on April 14, 2014—Boko Haram’s brutality has led to ruthless responses from local militaries against suspected supporters, and even civilian victims, of the group.

In July, Amnesty issued a report about another video that showed the point-blank execution of two women and two children by Cameroonian forces who accused them of supporting Boko Haram. (*The Intercept* was the first news outlet to publish that footage in full.) Those killings similarly took place in the Far North region, where Cameroon has for years conducted operations aimed at the militants, though the fighting there has recently diminished. For more than a-year-and-a-half, Cameroonian troops have also been conducting a brutal counterinsurgency campaign—killing unarmed protesters, destroying villages, burning homes—in the bilingual country’s minority Anglophone regions.

“The Department of Defense is gravely concerned about the recent video appearing to depict Cameroonian security forces conducting extrajudicial killings of civilians,” Major Sheryll Klinkel, a Pentagon spokesperson, told *The Intercept*. “This is the second video in a month depicting a similar inci-

dent. The Department of Defense takes these incidents seriously.”

According to Allegrozzi of Amnesty, “Crimes caught on camera are just the tip of the iceberg; they are part of a system where abuses are routine, where they are the rule not the exception. This culture of impunity seems to reflect the belief that annihilating suspected insurgents—whether Boko Haram or armed separatists—and terrorizing civilian populations is the way to re-establish security in various parts of the country. This strategy is not only unlawful, it’s also failing, as evidenced by the continually degrading security environment in the country, from the Far North to the North and Southwest.”

Torture at shared military base

The emergence of the two atrocity videos comes roughly one year after Amnesty, the London-based research firm Forensic Architecture, and *The Intercept* exposed illegal imprisonment, torture, and killings by Cameroonian troops at a remote military base that is also used by U.S. personnel and private contractors for training missions and drone surveillance. As the U.S. military fortified the Cameroonian site in the Far North, known as Salak, and supported the elite local troops based there, Amnesty found that suspects held at the outpost were subjected to water torture, beaten with electric cables and boards, or tied and suspended with ropes, among other abuses.



After the Salak revelations, U.S. Africa Command launched an investigation but never publicly announced details about its aims and has not released the completed report. As *The Intercept* has previously reported, a State Department official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said that AFRICOM’s investigation “did not consider Cameroonian human rights violations but focused on whether Department of Defense (DoD) personnel had knowledge of abuses by Cameroonian military forces.” It appears, in other words, that the U.S. military was less concerned with what the Cameroonians were doing, than whether any Americans knew about it.

For nearly one year, AFRICOM has ignored periodic requests from *The Intercept* seeking comment about the parameters, scope, and findings of its probe, which was headed by Brigadier General Timothy McAteer and concluded in November 2017.

“We believe that the AFRICOM investigation should be made public,” said Allegrozzi. “The report must be publicly released, not only to find out if any U.S. military personnel were aware of incommunicado detention and torture, but also to convey to the Cameroonian authorities how seriously the United States takes this issue.”

Between 2015 and 2018, the U.S. authorized roughly \$200 million in security aid for Cameroon, including \$108 million earmarked for counterterrorism. “Cameroon is one of the top six recipients in sub-Saharan Africa and in the top three for West Africa, so they are one of the key U.S. counterterrorism partners in sub-Saharan Africa,” Colby Goodman, director of the Security Assistance Monitor, which analyzes U.S. foreign military aid, told *The Intercept*.

Following the 2017 torture revelations, U.S. military assistance to some, if not all, units of Cameroon’s armed forces was reportedly suspended for a time. The State Department official

told *The Intercept* that “the suspension was based on the [U.S. government] analysis of all sources of credible information, including the 2017 Amnesty International report.”

Abuse found—aircraft secured

In April, the State Department released its annual human rights report on Cameroon, citing Amnesty’s 2017 findings and detailing a raft of abuses, including “arbitrary and unlawful killings through excessive use of force by security forces...torture and abuse by security forces including in military and unofficial detention facilities; prolonged arbitrary detentions including of suspected Boko Haram supporters and individuals in the Anglophone regions.” Just ten days later, however, Peter Barlerin, the U.S. ambassador to Cameroon, presided over a ceremony celebrating the transfer of two American-made surveillance aircraft to the Cameroon Air Force.

Nick Sadoski, the acting spokesperson for the State Department’s Africa Bureau, told *The Intercept* that “we have informed the Cameroonian government that lack of progress and clarity about actions undertaken by the government in response to allegations of human rights violations could result in a broader suspension of U.S. assistance that is directed toward Cameroonian efforts to counter violent extremist organizations, including especially Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa.”

Cameroon’s embassy in Washington, D.C. did not respond to *The Intercept*’s request for an interview. In an August 12 statement posted to *YouTube*, government spokesperson Issa Tchiroma Bakary announced that a “thorough investigation” would be carried out.

Allegrozzi called on the United States to push Cameroonian authorities to investigate human rights violations and carefully vet all Cameroonian military personnel recommended for

U.S. training. “More generally, the United States must take effective measures to ensure that any military cooperation with Cameroon, including training or technical advice, does not contribute to the commission of human rights violations and crimes under international law,” she said.

Goodman echoed those sentiments. “The U.S. definitely needs to follow these issues closely to investigate the risks of any of the aid provided being used for the commission of human rights violations—either in connection to Boko Haram or the Anglophone protesters,” he said. “The United States should be more transparent about their concerns because these are important issues. These are such serious issues that the American public and the Cameroonian public have a right to know what the United States is doing to attempt to prevent this in the future.”

U.S. officials claim that’s being done. “We are engaging with the Department of State to develop a coordinated approach to ensure that the Government of Cameroon credibly investigate these incidents, transparently manage its findings, and hold accountable any individuals found to be responsible,” the Pentagon’s Major Klinkel told *The Intercept* by email.

Nonetheless, AFRICOM, which is the combatant command responsible for Cameroon, remains silent about its long-suppressed report on torture in Cameroon. *The Intercept* contacted AFRICOM ten times over the course of roughly one month seeking comment. Email return receipts indicate that two spokespeople read the questions, but the command never responded.

—*The Intercept*, September 1, 2018

<https://theintercept.com/2018/08/31/cameroon-video-execution-boko-haram/>

1 Video can be viewed at:

<https://theintercept.com/2018/08/31/cameroon-video-execution-boko-haram/>

Gaza’s Economy Goes into Freefall

By JONATHAN COOK

The moment long feared is fast approaching in Gaza, according to a new report by the World Bank. After a decade-long Israeli blockade and a series of large-scale military assaults, the economy of the tiny coastal enclave is in “freefall.”

At a meeting of international donors in New York on Thursday, coinciding with the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, the World Bank painted an alarming picture of Gaza’s crisis. Unemployment now stands at close to 70 percent and the economy is contracting at an ever-faster rate.

While the West Bank’s plight is not yet as severe, it is not far behind; countries attending the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee were told. Gaza’s collapse could bring down the entire Palestinian banking sector.

In response, Europe hurriedly put together a €40 million aid package, but that will chiefly address Gaza’s separate humanitarian crisis—not the economic one—by improving supplies of electricity and potable water.

No one doubts the inevitable fallout from the economic and humanitarian crises gripping Gaza. The four parties

to the Quartet charged with overseeing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians—the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN—issued a statement warning that it was vital to prevent what they termed “further escalation” in Gaza.

The Israeli military shares these concerns. It has reported growing unrest among the enclave’s two million inhabitants and believes Hamas will be forced into a confrontation to break out of the straightjacket imposed by the blockade.

In recent weeks, mass protests along Gaza’s perimeter fence have been revived and expanded after a summer lull. On Friday, seven Palestinian demonstrators, including two children, were killed by Israeli sniper fire. Hundreds more were wounded.

Nonetheless, the political will to remedy the situation looks as atrophied as ever. No one is prepared to take meaningful responsibility for the time-bomb that is Gaza.

In fact, the main parties that could make a difference appear intent on allowing the deterioration to continue.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ignored repeated warnings of a threatened explosion in Gaza from his own military.

Instead, Israel is upholding the blockade as tightly as ever, preventing the flow of goods in and out of the enclave. Fishing is limited to three miles off the coast rather than the 20-mile zone agreed in the Oslo accords. Hundreds of companies are reported to have folded over the summer.

Intensifying the enclave's troubles is the Trump administration's recent decision to cut aid to the Palestinians, including to the United Nation's refugee agency, UNRWA. It plays a critical role in Gaza, providing food, education and health services to nearly two-thirds of the population.

The food budget is due to run out in December, and the schools budget by the end of this month. Hundreds-of-thousands of hungry children with nowhere to spend their days can only fuel the protests—and the deaths.

The Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas, headquartered in the West Bank, has no incentive to help. Gaza's slowly unfolding catastro-

phe is his leverage to make Hamas submit to his rule. That is why the Palestinian Authority has cut transfers to Gaza by \$30-million-a-month.

But even if Abbas wished to help, he largely lacks the means. The U.S. cuts were imposed primarily to punish him for refusing to play ball with U.S. President Donald Trump's supposed "deal of the century" peace plan.

Israel, the World Bank notes, has added to Abbas's difficulties by refusing to transfer taxes and customs duties it collects on the PA's behalf.

And the final implicated party, Egypt, is reticent to loosen its own chokehold on its short border with Gaza. President Abdel Fattah El Sisi opposes giving any succor either to his domestic Islamist opponents or to Hamas.

The impasse is possible only because none of the parties is prepared to make a priority of Gaza's welfare.

That was starkly illustrated earlier in the summer when Cairo, supported by the UN, opened a back channel between Israel and Hamas in the hope of ending their mounting friction.

Hamas wanted the blockade lifted to reverse Gaza's economic decline, while

Israel wanted an end to the weekly protests and the damaging images of snipers killing unarmed demonstrators.

In addition, Netanyahu has an interest in keeping Hamas in power in Gaza, if barely, as a way to cement the geographic split with the West Bank and an ideological one with Abbas.

The talks, however, collapsed quietly in early September after Abbas objected to the Egyptians. He insisted that the Palestinian Authority be the only address for discussions of Gaza's future. So, Cairo is yet again channeling its energies into a futile attempt at reconciling Abbas and Hamas.

At the UN General Assembly, Trump promised his peace plan would be unveiled in the next two to three months, and made explicit for the first time his support for a two-state solution, saying it would "work best."

Netanyahu vaguely concurred, while pointing out: "Everyone defines the term 'state' differently." His definition, he added, required that not one of the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank be removed and that any future Palestinian state be under complete Israeli security control.

Abbas is widely reported to have conceded over the summer that a Palestinian state—should it ever come into being—would be demilitarized. In other words, it would not be recognizable as a sovereign state.

Hamas has made notable compromises to its original doctrine of military resistance to secure all of historic Palestine. But it is hard to imagine it agreeing to peace on those terms. This makes a reconciliation between Hamas and Abbas currently inconceivable—and respite for the people of Gaza as far off as ever.

—CounterPunch, October 2, 2018

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/10/02/everyone-washes-their-hands-as-gazas-economy-goes-into-freefall/>



Climate of Class Rule: Common(s)er Revolt or Common Ruin

BY PAUL STREET

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes. — Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1848

“A level of criminality almost hard to describe”

The great orange dumpster fire Donald J. Trump’s part in the reigning United States media-politics horror show is to distract the populace from the lethal pillaging of the commons behind the scenes. The leading left thinker Noam Chomsky put it very well in an interview last March:

“Trump’s role is to ensure that the media and that public attention are always concentrated on him. So every time you turn on a television set, it’s Trump; open the front page of the newspaper: Trump.... So every day there’s one insane thing after another and then, you know, he makes some crazy lie....and the media looks at it and says ‘No, [not true]’...But meanwhile he’s onto something else and then you go to that...”

“And while this show is going on in public, in the background the wrecking crew is working...systematically dismantling every aspect of government that works for the benefit of the population. ...In the case of global warming, it’s almost indescribable. Not only has the U.S. pulled out—uniquely alone in the world—from the international efforts to do at least something about it. But, beyond that...the Trump Administration is going out

of its way to increase the threat. Listen to his State of the Union Address, the only phrase about global climate was to talk about ‘our beautiful clean coal,’ the worst polluter there is...The new budget that’s coming out ...sharply cuts research and support for any kind of renewable energy: more subsidies and support for the most polluting, destructive things.”

“And, it’s not just Trump, it’s the entire Republican leadership. So, if you look at the 2016 election, at the primaries, every single candidate, not a single exception, either denied that global warming is taking place or said ‘Maybe it is but we shouldn’t do anything about it,’ which I think is worse. They were called the moderates, like [John] Kasich. If you look at Trump himself, or say Rex Tillerson, Secretary of State, they know perfectly well that humans are causing global warming. In fact, Trump has golf courses all over; he

hasn’t built a wall in Mexico yet but he’s building walls around his golf courses to make sure that the sea level doesn’t destroy them.”

“Rex Tillerson, the CEO of ExxonMobil—since the 1970s scientists at ExxonMobil have been—we now know, they’ve been made public, forced to be made public—they’ve been producing severe warnings to the leadership about the effect of the use of petroleum on destroying the environment. So they all know about it but they’re not doing anything about it, which is a level of criminality that is almost hard to find words to describe. I mean, here are, you know, educated well-off rich people, upper elite, who know that what they’re doing is destroying the prospects for human—organized *human life—and do it anyway because they make more profits tomorrow. Can you think of an analog for that in human history? I really can’t*” (emphasis added).



“Not a wake-up call anymore”

Jump a half-year ahead to the late summer and early fall of 2018. Fully 17 of the 18 warmest years since modern record-keeping began have occurred since 2001. Numerous record-setting heat and related deadly weather (wildfires, droughts, rains, flood, mudslides, etc.) events have occurred, as predicted in the (supposedly controversial) climate models produced by scientists who have been trying to warn the world for many years about the ecological consequences of burning fossil fuels on a mass scale. One headline I recall this summer announced that 2018 was the year in which global warming went from being a future “threat” to a lived “menace.” As the *New York Times*’ climate correspondent Somini Sengupta wrote last August:

“This summer of fire and swelter looks a lot like the future that scientists have been warning about in the era of climate change... In California, firefighters are racing to control what has become the largest fire in state history. Harvests of staple grains like wheat and corn are expected to dip this year, in some cases sharply, in countries as different as Sweden and El Salvador. In Europe, nuclear power plants have had to shut down because the river water that cools the reactors was too warm. Heat waves on four continents have brought electricity grids crashing...And dozens of heat-related deaths in Japan this summer offered a foretaste of what researchers warn could be big increases in mortality from extreme heat.”

“‘It’s not a wake-up call anymore,’ Cynthia Rosenzweig, who runs the climate impacts group at the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said of global warming and its human toll. ‘It’s now absolutely happening to millions of people around the world.’”

“For many scientists, this is the year they started living climate change rather than just studying it. ‘What we’re seeing today is making

me, frankly, calibrate not only what my children will be living but what I will be living, what I am currently living,’ said Kim Cobb, a professor of earth and atmospheric science at the Georgia Institute of Technology...”

As I started writing this essay, Tropical Storm Gordon was gaining strength in the overheated Gulf of Mexico, where the temperature was 87 degrees Fahrenheit—too warm for a swimming pool.

“It was not humanity as a whole that created ... large-scale industry and the massive textile factories of Manchester in the 19th century or Detroit in the last century or Shenzhen today. It was capital.”

Extreme weather and its collateral damage are only tips of the melting iceberg, semi-metaphorically speaking. The real climatological shit hits the eco-extremist fan when we can’t grow enough food, find enough water, and keep ourselves cool enough to survive—and when global warming combines with collapsing social and technical infrastructure to bring pandemics that wipe out much of an increasingly thirsty, under-nourished, and overheated human race.

“Heat waves are bound to get more intense and more frequent as emissions rise... On the horizon,” Sengupta warns, “is a future of cascading system failures threatening basic necessities like food supply and electricity.”

The existential wall is already being hit in some countries. El Salvador farmers suffered a disastrous corn harvest this summer as temperatures

spiked to a record 107 degrees Fahrenheit. They went without rain for six weeks in some regions.

A hint of the dark future comes from northern Europe: “Wheat production in many countries of the European Union is set to decline this year. In Britain,” Sengupta reports, “wheat yields are projected to hit a five-year low. German farmers say their grain harvests are likely to be lower than normal. And in Sweden, record-high temperatures have left fields parched and farmers scrambling to find fodder for their livestock.”

Blaming arrogant and stupid humanity

The culprit? A long and widely read *New York Times* Magazine essay written by Nathaniel Rich last July was titled “Losing Earth.” Rich blames the human species for its childish failure to properly heed the alarms of its intellectual adults—scientists. Rich indicts a “human nature” flawed by an inability to “sacrifice[e] present convenience to forestall a penalty imposed on future generations.” He condemns *homo sapiens*’ tendency to “obsess over the present, worry about the medium-term and cast the long term out of our minds, as we might spit out a poison.” The offender, according to Nathaniel Rich, is We the People. We simply aren’t wired to plan responsibly beyond the present moment of immediate gratification.

A recent *Truthdig* essay by the leading left thinker Chris Hedges is titled “Saying Goodbye to Planet Earth.” Surveying the damning evidence and likely future path of human-generated environmental ruin, Hedges concludes that “the refusal of our species to significantly curb the carbon emissions and pollutants that might cause human extinction” has brought “human-induced change to the ecosystem” that, “will probably make the biosphere inhospitable to most forms of life.” The enemy is arrogant humanity

itself, perpetrator of “the Anthropocene”—the reckless alteration of Earth systems by *homo sapiens* and its carbon-intensive industrialized lifestyle.

Humanity as a whole or capital?

Other thinkers of an eco-Marxian bent, myself included, narrow the diagnosis. They historicize the climate crisis, situating it in the specific historical context of capitalism. The concept of “the Anthropocene” has rich geological validity and holds welcome political relevance in countering the carbon-industrial complex’s denial of humanity’s responsibility for contemporary climate change, they note. Still, they counsel, we must guard against lapsing into the historically misleading, fatalistic, and often class-blind use of “Anthro,” projecting the currently and historically recent age of capital onto the broad 100,000-year swath of human activity on and in nature. As the Green Marxist environmental sociologist and geographer Jason Moore reminded radio interviewer Sasha Lilley last a few years ago, “It was not humanity as a whole that created ...large-scale industry and the massive textile factories of Manchester in the 19th century or Detroit in the last century or Shenzhen today. It was capital.”

Indeed, it was not humanity as a whole that built the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in 2015 and 2016. It was capital, corralled in the accounts of Energy Transfer Partners, under the supervision of a reckless, eco-cidal and profit-mad billionaire named Kelcy Warren, who funded the DAPL with billions-of-dollars from across the world’s leading financial institutions.

It was not humanity as whole that hid evidence of Greenhouse Gassing’s deadly impact on human prospects. It was capital on various levels but most particularly in the form of Exxon-Mobil, who (in the greatest climate and environmental crime in history) buried the findings of its very own cutting-edge scientists in the 1970s and 1980s—

an offence that, as Chomsky says, “is almost hard to find words to describe.”

Moore and other left analysts argue with good reason that it is more appropriate to understand humanity’s Earth-altering assault on livable ecology as the “Capitalocene.” It is just a relatively small slice of human history—roughly the last half-millennium give or take a century or so—during which human society has been socially and institutionally wired by a specific form of class rule to relentlessly assault on an ultimately geocidal scale.

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It is only during the relatively brief period of history when capitalism has ruled the world system (since 1600 or thereabouts by some calculations, earlier and later by others) that human social organization has developed the inner, accumulation-, commodification-, “productivity”-, and growth-mad compulsion to transform Earth

systems—with profitability and “productivity” dependent upon on the relentless appropriation of “cheap nature” (cheap food, cheap energy, cheap raw materials and cheap human labor power.) Moore maintains that “humanity’s” destruction of livable ecology is explained by changes that capitalism’s addictive and interrelated pursuits of profit and empire imposed on its behavior within “the web of life.”

It is capitalism and its quarterly earnings obsession with short-term profits, not Rich’s “human nature,” that constantly plunders and poisons the commons and trumps long-term planning for the common good.

In terms of measurable material consequences, it is true, the real destructive and Earth-altering impact of capitalism dates not from the beginning of capitalism but from more recent history. The original “Anthropocene” argument pegged the major changes with the onset of the Industrial Revolution around 1800 but recent Earth science findings point to 1945 and the post-WWII era of U.S.-led global monopoly-capitalist economic expansion as the real material onset of the Anthropocene/Capitalocene. That is something to keep in mind when reading the often brilliant left-environmentalist Naomi Klein, who tends, as Sam Gindin has noted, to hedge her descriptions of “capitalism’s” disastrous environmental impact by particularly criticizing the profits system of the post-1970s neoliberal era and not capitalism *per se*.

Still, the social, historical, political and class-historical DNA of the eco-cidal capitalist disease crystalized during Europe’s transition from feudalism to capitalism in the wake of the Black Death.

This matters for those who want to avert catastrophe. There is no desirable remedy without a proper historical diagnosis. Those who want to avert a new Black Death on a planetary scale need to confront the imperial world

system that emerged in feudalism's aftermath—capitalism as such.

We cannot afford denial and evasion about eco-extremist systems of class rule any more than we can afford denial and evasion of human beings' impact (under the command of capital) on life systems.

“We think we're not part of the biosphere”

These differences aside, there's a wonderful line in Chris Hedges' “Goodbye Earth” essay. Hedges features the chilling (no irony intended) insight of astrophysics professor Adam Frank, who theorizes that “If you develop an industrial civilization like ours, the route is going to be the same,” Frank says. “You're going to have a hard time not triggering climate change” (Frank mind-expansively guesses that this drama has already been played out on other planets in a universe that is now known to include millions of potentially life-supporting worlds).

“We think we're not a part of the biosphere—that we're above it—that we're special,” Frank told Hedges. But “We're not special. We're the experiment that the biosphere is running now.”

That's exactly right, however one understands and periodizes “the Anthropocene.” Perhaps the greatest mistake privileged humans ever made was to follow Descartes and other leading Western thinkers (none more stridently perhaps than Sir Francis Bacon) in advocating the species' supposedly noble mission of becoming “like masters and owners of nature.”

We are no such thing. Pretending that we are somehow above “Nature” is species suicide.

Think of the title of Nathaniel Rich's article: “Losing Earth.” Does it not remind one of the old global McCarthyite charges that “We [the United States] Lost China” (and/or North Korea and Cuba and Vietnam?)

I can lose my cell phone or my fountain pen. You can lose your thermostat. But we can't “lose Earth” or “China,” because they were never ours to possess in the first place. Who in the name of God (or whatever other higher power one wants to cite) told Nathaniel Rich that “Earth” was “ours” to “lose?” Was Rich's title not the height of anthro-centric arrogance?

It is capitalism and its quarterly earnings obsession with short-term profits, not Rich's “human nature,” that constantly plunders and poisons the commons and trumps long-term planning for the common good.

Super-rich folks looking to escape “The Event”

How do the “masters of the universe”—the members of the world's “unelected dictatorship of money” (Edward S. Herman and David Peterson's excellent phrase)—feel about the dire threats posed to human existence by the system that has generated their outsized opulence and power? Perhaps they fantasize that their fortunes will permit them to somehow escape to other worlds or (less fantastically) to insulate themselves with armed guards and special resource stockpiles on this one.

In an essay bearing the suitably appropriate title “Survival of the Richest,” the leading academic “media theorist” and “digital economics” professor, lecturer, and documentarian Douglas Rushkoff tells of an invitation he accepted last year to “a super-deluxe private resort to deliver a keynote

speech to what I assumed would be a hundred or so investment bankers. It was,” Rushkoff writes. “by far the largest fee I had ever been offered for a talk—about half my annual professor's salary—all to deliver some insight on the subject of ‘the future of technology.’” When Rushkoff arrived he found that his real assignment was to help five ultra-rich financial parasites figure out how they and their families might survive the coming collapse of a world they themselves had (quite unmentionably) helped wire for disaster:

“...I was ushered into what I thought was the green room. But instead of being wired with a microphone or taken to a stage, I just sat there at a plain round table as my audience was brought to me: five super-wealthy guys—yes, all men—from the upper echelon of the hedge fund world. After a bit of small talk, I realized they had no interest in the information I had prepared about the future of technology. They had come with questions of their own.”

“They started out innocuously enough. Ethereum or bitcoin? Is quantum computing a real thing? Slowly but surely, however, they edged into their real topics of concern...Which region will be less impacted by the coming climate crisis: New Zealand or Alaska? Is Google really building Ray Kurzweil a home for his brain, and will his consciousness live through the transition, or will it die and be reborn as a whole new one? Finally, the CEO of a brokerage house explained that he had nearly completed building his own underground bunker system and asked, ‘How do I maintain authority over my security force after the event?’”

“‘The Event.’ That was their euphemism for the environmental collapse, social unrest, nuclear explosion, unstoppable virus, or Mr. Robot hack that takes everything down.”

“This single question occupied us for the rest of the hour. They

knew armed guards would be required to protect their compounds from the angry mobs. But how would they pay the guards once money was worthless? What would stop the guards from choosing their own leader? The billionaires considered using special combination locks on the food supply that only they knew. Or making guards wear disciplinary collars of some kind in return for their survival. Or maybe building robots to serve as guards and workers—if that technology could be developed in time.”

“That’s when it hit me: At least as far as these gentlemen were concerned, this was a talk about the future of technology. Taking their cue from Elon Musk colonizing Mars, Peter Thiel reversing the aging process, or Sam Altman and Ray Kurzweil uploading their minds into supercomputers, they were preparing for a digital future that had a whole lot less to do with making the world a better place than it did with transcending the human condition altogether and insulating themselves from a very real and present danger of climate change, rising sea levels, mass migrations, global pandemics, nativist panic, and resource depletion. For them, the future of technology is really about just one thing: escape.”

The deadly “buffer of wealth”

It is important I think, to note that the climate crisis hits disadvantaged populations first and the rich and powerful last. One problem “our species” faces is that class rule tends to delay a civilization’s capacity to perceive threats to its continued existence until the full consequences of the civilization’s deadly practices are felt by those who have been protected by class privilege from environmental harm. By the time the ruling class gets it, things have gone too far.

This is one of the timeworn paths to societal ruin discussed in a paper published five years ago by mathematician Safa Motesharrei, atmospheric scientist Eugenia Kalnay and political scientist Jorge Rivas in the journal *Ecological*

Economics. Reviewing past societal collapses, they reflected on a potential current global scenario in which:

“[T]he Elites—due to their wealth—do not suffer the detrimental effects of the environmental collapse until much later than the Commoners. This buffer of wealth allows Elites to continue ‘business as usual’ despite the impending catastrophe. It ...explain[s] how historical collapses were allowed to occur by elites who appear to be oblivious to the catastrophic trajectory (most clearly apparent in the Roman and Mayan cases.) This buffer effect is further reinforced by the long, apparently sustainable trajectory prior to the beginning of the collapse. While some members of society might raise the alarm that the system is moving towards an impending collapse and therefore advocate structural changes to society in order to avoid it, Elites and their supporters, who opposed making these changes, could point to the long sustainable trajectory ‘so far’ in support of doing nothing.”

Is this not the state of “humanity” under the command of capital today, with many millions of disproportionately poor and powerless people already suffering from climate disruption while the wealthy few continue to enjoy lives

of unimaginable, environmentally shielded opulence atop a recklessly fossil-fueled planet so vastly unequal that the world’s eight richest people possess as much wealth between them as the bottom half of the species?

It’s “the rich,” not humanity in general, that “are destroying the Earth,” as Herve Kempf noted in the title and text of an important book eleven years ago. At the same time however, it is in fact up to “our species,” yes, humanity, to save itself and other Earthly life forms by engaging in a great mass uprising against those who have plundered and poisoned the commons for private profit. (If there’s another intelligent life form out there that survived the transition to high-tech modernity and developed the capacity to save other species in the galaxy, now would be the time for them to travel through time and space to lend us a hand. I’m not holding my breath for that!) The best bet we have, my fellow world citizens and common(s)ers, is eco-socialist people’s revolution here on the planet itself.

—CounterPunch, September 7, 2018

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/09/07/climate-of-class-rule-commonser-revolt-or-common-ruin/>



Climate Change: What About the Marxists?

BY W.T. WHITNEY

Author John Steinbeck in 1962 asked, “Why must progress look so much like destruction?”¹ In fact, ever-expanding production of things—progress, in other words—promotes destruction in the form of climate change. Perpetrators of boundless production dominate in our governments and society, and so climate change has advanced. The story might have been different had capitalism never existed.

Cuban president Fidel Castro said as much on June 12, 1992. He was addressing the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development—known as the “Earth Summit”—in Rio de Janeiro.

Castro declared that, “An important biological species—humankind—is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive elimination of its natural habitat. We are becoming aware of this problem when it is almost too late to prevent it.” He mentioned that “consumer societies...consume two-thirds of all metals and three-fourths of the energy produced worldwide. They have poisoned the seas and the rivers. ...They have saturated the atmosphere with gases, altering climatic conditions with the catastrophic effects we are already beginning to suffer. ... Tomorrow will be too late to do what we should have done a long time ago.”

At the Earth Summit that day, 154 nations signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Now, however, “...the Earth System may be approaching a planetary threshold that could lock in a continuing rapid pathway toward much hotter conditions—Hothouse Earth. This pathway would be propelled by strong, intrinsic, biogeophysical feedbacks difficult to influence by human actions.” This was according to a scientific paper

published August 6, 2018 by the National Academy of Sciences.

Headlines across the world signaled alarm. For example: “Even If Emission Reduction Targets Are Met, Earth Still Heading Towards ‘Hothouse’ State” (*Huffington Post*); “We may be close to runaway climate change, a new paper warns” (*ZME Science*); “Earth risks tipping into irreversible ‘hothouse’ state due to fossil fuel use: study” (*The Japan Times*); “Climate Change may become unstoppable within decades” (*The Times of London*).

In her *Silent Spring* (1962), Rachel Carson reported that disturbance of the balance of nature by humans had led to disaster. Left to itself, nature imposes limits within which feedback and recycling mechanisms are at work and there’s interdependency of species. Rachel Carson revealed that the indiscriminant use of pesticides had disrupted biological processes and poisoned humans, animal species, and the land.

Elsewhere she touched upon human responsibility: “The modern world worships the gods of speed and quantity and of the quick and easy profit, and out of this idolatry monstrous evils have arisen.”²

The burning of carbon-containing fuels has released gases that, accumulating in the atmosphere, have undermined equilibrium between their heat-retaining properties and conditions favoring life. In their valuable book *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism* (Monthly Review Press), Fred Magdoff and John Bellamy Foster note that, “Climate change...is only one of a number of planetary rifts brought on by the crossing of planetary boundaries.” Capitalism, they say, “recognizes no limits to its own self expansion—there is no amount of profit, no amount of wealth, and no amount of consumption that is either ‘enough’ or ‘too much.’”

A recent article occupying the entire *New York Times* Sunday Magazine brought the discussion to a larger audience. The title was “Losing Earth.” Author Nathaniel Rich reports that between 1979 and 1989, consensus had developed in high government and scientific circles that the problem was serious. He recounts scientific conferences and reports, oil-company involvement, a couple of congressional hearings, several front-page *New York Times* headlines. Everyone involved agreed action was necessary. Then in 1989, as Rich reports, things collapsed.

That year high officials of dozens of countries met in the Netherlands under the auspices of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. They couldn’t agree on reducing carbon emissions. As disappointed delegates were leaving their last meeting, a U.S. reporter asked a Swedish delegate, “What’s happening?” “Your government is fucking this thing up” was the answer.

Beyond his unsatisfactory mention of “human nature,” Rich doesn’t identify causes of the debacle. Even so, his article offers bits of information hinting at an explanation.

By 1988 the U.S. government at the executive level appeared to be moving toward a plan for reducing emissions. At that point, however, White House officials tried to censure scientific testimony—even that of prestigious climate scientist James Hanson. They did send a U.S. delegation to the Netherlands meeting, but only to exert U.S. “leadership.” Oil company scientists were no longer cooperating. Exxon henceforth would “emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions.” Capitalism was in charge.

Rich’s narrative suggests that the ten-year process was in the hands of a small

band of insiders: a few scientists (including one from Exxon), members of government commissions and advisory boards, a couple of congressmen, and environmental activist and publicist Rafe Pomerance, who had “charisma.” The lack of public participation and leadership suggests a deficit of democracy.

Naomi Klein and others took Rich to task. In a widely circulated article, she points out that “the late ’80s was the absolute zenith of the neoliberal crusade, a moment of peak ideological ascendancy for the economic and social project that deliberately set out to vilify collective action.” Rich, she says, was oblivious to this.

Klein was returning to the theme of her well-known book *This Changes Everything* (2014). There she blamed capitalists for allowing climate change to advance. Praising the worldwide anti-capitalist campaigns of local activists, social movements, and indigenous peoples, she shied away from a socialist alternative.

Later, in responding to Rich, she declares that, “humanity’s best shot at collective survival” lies with “a new form of democratic eco-socialism, with the humility to learn from Indigenous teachings about the duties to future generations.” She adds that, “autocratic industrial socialism” was “a disaster for the environment.” One assumes that Klein rejects the model of revolutionary socialism founded in the 19th century by Marx and Engels.

Now the main point: because capitalism contributed to the advance of climate change, resistance to climate change must be anti-capitalist and on that account, socialist. Because it’s a high-stakes issue, human survival itself, a type of socialism is required whose theory and prescriptions aim at undoing rather than reforming capitalism.

Those are qualities peculiar to Marxism. Marxists see capitalism’s end being hastened by contradictions within. Climate change is such a contradiction. The call from Marx and

Engels was for “Workers of the world [to] unite,” and, conveniently, climate change is a global phenomenon.

The hallmark for capitalists is their tendency to steal, beginning with the proceeds from labor. They expropriate land in order to profit from topsoil or from what’s underneath. They’ve expropriated human bodies and their labor, and commandeered the rights of women and all those whom they view as disposable.

And the capitalists sacrifice the balance of nature for the sake of plunder. Karl Marx himself examined the rift between cities and the countryside coinciding with the industrial revolution. He discovered that traditional means for replenishing soil fertility had lost out to the use and abuse of land by capitalists dedicated to accumulation.

For Marxists, progressive change comes about through struggle between social classes. Climate change mostly threatens the survival of people who work or want to work. We think they are ready to struggle against the class of people who, intent upon profit-taking, have denied the existence of climate change or have impeded efforts to stop it or soften its effects.

Young people these days are attracted to socialism, according to reports.³ Concerned about climate change, they are ripe for absorbing teachings of the Marxist movement. They will realize that halfway measures aren’t enough. Prominent eco-socialist Ian Angus writes, for example, that “Incremental linear changes to the present socioeconomic system are not enough to stabilize the Earth System. Widespread, rapid, and fundamental transformations will likely be required.” He was commenting on the report published by the National Academy of Science, mentioned above.

Or, as Richard Smith of the Democratic Socialists of

America suggests: “We can’t suppress emissions without closing down companies...We need to socialize those companies, nationalize them, buy them out and take them into public hands.”

The challenge for Marxists is great. Environmental issues have never been at the top of their agenda in the United States. Their numbers are reduced and their organizations are small and often at odds with one another. But the future weighs heavily and it makes sense—really it’s imperative—for U.S. Marxists to take on the job of teaching and agitating on climate change, late though it may be. Resources are at hand, notably writers associated with *Monthly Review*, the *Climate and Capitalism* website, and the System Change Not Climate Change coalition.

This exercise ends with a lament that governments for, by, and of the people seem to be unengaged with the problem of human survival—and with a longing for revolutionary leadership in the mold of Fidel Castro.

W.T. Whitney Jr. is a retired pediatrician and political journalist living in Maine.

—CounterPunch, September 6, 2018

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/09/06/climate-change-what-about-the-marxists/>

1 John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley: in Search of America*, (Viking Press, NY, 1962), p. 181

2 Taken from Rachel Carson’s *Preface to Animal Machines*, by Ruth Harrison (1964)

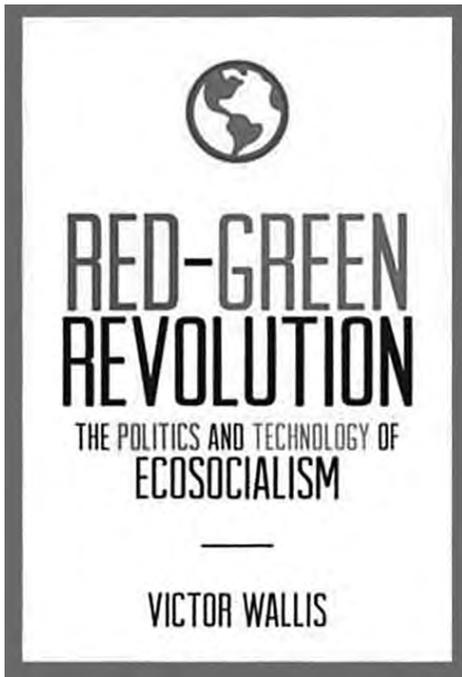
3 See, for example, “The New Socialists,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2018.



Red-Green Revolution

The politics and technology of ecosocialism

BY VICTOR WALLIS



Red-Green Revolution

The Politics and Technology of Ecosocialism

By Victor Wallis p-9i b v 456
Political Animal Press, 2018

We reprint here the preface to Red-Green Revolution The Politics and Technology of Ecosocialism as an introduction to this very important book. —Socialist Viewpoint

Over the quarter-century of this book's gestation, the alarm signals that struck me as I began working on it have risen to an almost deafening volume. Climate scientists are constantly finding that their dire projections pale in comparison with the actual pace at which life-sustaining natural infrastructures are breaking down.

The disaster that ecological activists of the last half-century have sought to prevent is already vividly present. Its most dramatic expression, apart from the endlessly repeated scenes of fire, flood, parched earth, and emaciated

polar bears, is the tens-of-millions of refugees, desperate for a place to live.¹ Some are fleeing sea-level rise and flooded or storm-battered homes; others are fleeing wars precipitated by sustained, drought-induced collapses of the food supply (as in Syria, Central Africa, and Central America.) Still others are fleeing wars and repression that reflect long-standing imperialist projects, but whose initiators have become ever more intransigent as they seek to ward off the prospect of a diminished resource-base.

Increasing percentages of the refugees, if they survive their typically harrowing treks or dangerous sea voyages, come up against vast numbers of agents "trained, armed, and paid to stop them."² This drive to "stop them" is promoted by a ruling class, which at the same time relentlessly stokes the economic engines of capital that gave rise to the climate crisis in the first place. While the top U.S. mouthpiece of this ruling class, along with his acolytes at the Environmental "Protection" Agency, mocks the reality of climate change, the military leaders who command the system's armed enforcers have had no hesitation (for at least the last fifteen years) in publicly situating what they acknowledge to be the consequences of global warming—the droughts, floods, and hurricanes that directly or indirectly have pushed mass migration to its cur-

rent extreme levels—at the center of their concerns.

The alternatives are sharply etched. The currently dominant forces, rather than join the fight against climate change, erect walls to block out its victims. By militarizing the problem, they not only draw resources away from any possible remedial steps; they also accelerate the spread of devastation.

What other path can be chosen? That is the subject of this book. The short answer is that a radical power-shift is needed. But it's one thing to recognize this and quite another to draw the indispensable majority into the struggle to achieve it. Part of that task consists in relating the overarching ecological goal to popular aspirations at every level. Another part consists in developing a political mechanism—a political force—that can embody and enforce the collective interest. Yet another involves discovering, explaining, advocating, and applying all the measures needed in order to slow

How to Save the Environment: END CAPITALISM!



down—and, where possible, reverse—the dangerous environmental trends.

Reversing at least some of these trends is indeed still possible. It will certainly require the mix of alternative energies, conservation practices, and social reorganization discussed in this book. The culmination of work along all these dimensions, insofar as it can be achieved, will be the restoration of biodiversity. Restoring biodiversity will entail, among other things, restoring moisture to parched earth and drawing carbon back out of the atmosphere and into the soil, where it can support life rather than endangering it.

The currently dominant forces, rather than join the fight against climate change, erect walls to block out its victims. By militarizing the problem, they not only draw resources away from any possible remedial steps; they also accelerate the spread of devastation.

The struggle to restore the soil and the struggle to create a just social order have up to now been carried on mostly as parallel political movements, without much mutual awareness, let alone collaboration, at the mass level. Such collaboration, however, or at least the striving to attain it, is the true centerpiece of *Red–Green Revolution*.

1 See Ai Wewei's 2017 documentary, *Human Flow*, where the number of refugees is given as 65 million.

2 Todd Miller, *Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration, and Homeland Security*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2017, 30.

Wholesale Crimes

Terracide—the total destruction of the earth-system.

BY VICTOR WALLIS

In their 1979 book *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, Noam Chomsky and the late Edward S. Herman drew a distinction between retail and wholesale acts of terrorism. Retail acts were those carried out by individuals or small groups; wholesale, those committed by vast national military forces.

Tom Engelhardt, in a recent column explaining the deeply criminal thrust of the Trump legacy, recalls to our attention a term coined in 2013 by journalist Nick Turse: terracide, meaning the total destruction of the earth-system—next to which the common crimes committed by isolated individuals pale in magnitude.

The distinction here is one of scale and not of principle, as in the classic juxtaposition of robbing a bank (“retail”) versus owning one and fleecing the entire public (“wholesale.”) This point is easy enough for anyone to see, but, sadly, it has not become a matter of common awareness.

Why is it so difficult for people to perceive the criminality of the dominant priorities? This is where the political culture—*aka* the politics of mass deception—comes into play.

The political culture is many-faced, depending on which part of the public is being addressed. Above all, the political culture is shaped not only by those most fervently committed to a particular agenda, but also by all those who serve the central actors as buffers or enablers.

Typically, the buffers or enablers try to project a certain distance between themselves and the main actors. This was exemplified in the anonymous *New York Times* column of September 5, whose author denounced Trump while embracing the Trump agenda.

Such dissociation, however, is fraudulent. The fit between Trump's *persona* and his government's agenda is not accidental. The agenda cannot be rationally defended. It rests on lies—most conspicuously, about the climate crisis—and therefore requires shameless hacks to defend it.

Not all of them are exactly like Trump, of course, but Trump got to play the flagship role because of the media's wall-to-wall coverage of him throughout the run-up to the 2016 election.

Another type of enabler is the evasive lawyer, whom we now see in the



Terracide—the total destruction of the earth-system.

person of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Where Trump peddles the dominant agenda with bombast (sometimes embarrassing to his staff-enablers,) Kavanaugh and his strategists rely on stealth, specifically, concealing the legal trickery in which he took part in advancing the anti-popular agenda (e.g., on reproductive rights) of the Bush administration. Behind Kavanaugh's evasiveness lies an unambiguous commitment to corporate interests over citizen rights, as illustrated in his contention that Net Neutrality violates the free-speech rights of corporations.

A less direct but no less vital set of enablers is Trump's "loyal opposition:" the top Democrats and the corporate

media, who in this context act very much as a unit. Basically, they have legitimized Trump by failing to offer policies in the interest of the majority and then by attacking both his election and his administration on false grounds—focusing disproportional attention on alleged Russian influences and not giving the electorate the understanding and the organizational tools that they would need in order to effectively advance an alternative agenda.

The Democrats out of power get to play the role of "good guys," but their unwillingness to advocate and work toward ambitious policy changes means that when they return to office, they will succeed only in driving a still passive citizenry back into the arms of the Republicans.

This dynamic is particularly upsetting when we consider how little time remains to halt the course toward environmental catastrophe—the terracide that Engelhardt speaks of. It's a matter of urgency to get rid of profit-driven economic decisions and replace them with a structure in which decisions are grounded in the real interests of the natural world and of human society as a whole. Until such a structure is attained, the currently dominant forces will only tighten their grip even further, thereby accelerating the drive to destruction.

—*Common Dreams*, September 7, 2018

<https://www.commondreams.org/views/2018/09/07/wholesale-crimes?cd->

INCARCERATION NATION

Bi-Partisan Hell

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

In much of public discourse today, one hears the call for "bi-partisanship," as in the nation's two corporate political parties, working together to "get things done."

One hears this mostly from corporate media elites, or intellectuals, who decry the lack of civility in today's politics.

What does this mean in the real world? It is a plaintive plea that politicians play nicer. In practice, however, it really means that they unite before their funders to bequeath more and more of the nation's wealth on them.

For the poor, the impoverished, the immigrant and the oppressed, it really means more war on them!

For the wealthy elites ever love disunion among the people; between irrelevancies—like race, ethnicity and social rank. They have ever and always tried to use race, language, age and

other perceived differences, to drive workers at each other's throats. They have ever stoked fear of the "other" to secure their class ascendancy.

That's the lesson of Trumpism, but he is not alone in this.

Do you oppose Trump because of his racist, fear-mongering call for the Wall?

On April 23, 2006, the *New York Daily News* published an article quoting Hillary Clinton saying "We need a wall."

Immigrant wars, it seems, are bi-partisan, for both corporate parties utilize fear to drive voters to the polls.

Bi-partisan politics brought us NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement,) the AEDPA (the so-called

Effective Death Penalty Act,) the Chinese Exclusion Act—and so much more.

Bi-partisanship equals repression, amid the toothy smiles of political jackals.

—*Prison Radio*, August 27, 2018



Prison Slavery

By ERIK LOOMIS

Since August 21, 2018, prisoners across the United States have been on one of the largest prison strikes the nation has seen in years. They have several demands, but at the top is the end of the forced labor the state coerces out of them. Up to 800,000-prisoners-a-day are put out for work without their choice, usually for extremely paltry compensation that in Louisiana is as low as four-cents-per-hour.

With often privatized prisons operating with maximum security and limited communication among prisoners, even discovering what is happening remains difficult, yet prisoners have organized themselves nonetheless in one of the most important labor actions in this country.

The prison strike is a multiracial action, but that African-Americans make up a disproportionate number of the nation's prison population and its leadership of this movement is no accident. This strike is part of centuries' worth of labor actions to protest the compelled labor out of Black bodies by a white-dominated society. We should not see the prison strike as an isolated event. It is instead the latest iteration of demands for freedom from forced labor that go back to slavery.

From the beginning of Black chattel slavery in what became the United States, African-American workers have sought to take control over their lives and work. Sometimes this was through slave revolts such as Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 Virginia. But more common was individual acts of resistance—running away, slowing down in the fields, stealing food from the master.

During the Civil War, slaves freed themselves by walking to Union lines. What was a trickle in 1861 became a flood by 1864, as thousands of self-emancipated slaves followed Union soldiers. What the pioneering civil

rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois called the “general strike” of slaves changed the outcome of the war, forcing a reluctant Lincoln administration to move toward the Emancipation Proclamation and then the 13th Amendment, all while slowing the Confederate war effort by undermining the labor force and thus the economy. Slaves could not have won the war by themselves, but their actions were crucial in deciding the war and creating its moral impact.

The Civil War may have ended chattel slavery, but the 13th Amendment had a fatal flaw, allowing for an exception from free labor for the incarcerated. Almost immediately, states, especially in the South, used this to control Black labor. They began rounding up ex-slaves after the war, passing vagrancy laws that allowed the state to sell their labor. Congressional interference during Reconstruction briefly limited this practice, but by the late 19th century, white rule created a huge economic sector based upon unfree Black labor, especially in the prison chain gangs at institutions such as Mississippi's notorious Parchman Farm, symbol of the Jim Crow era's

murderous regime against Black people, as well as in contract labor, where private employers worked Black prisoners into the grave. Increasingly, prison authorities compelled labor out of non-Black prisoners as well.

The civil rights movement challenged this prison regime, but by no means ended it. In Texas during the 1970s, segregated prison gangs worked under overseers picking cotton for no money. This was modern slavery. In 1978, 1,500 inmates at the Canfield Prison in Ellis, Texas, refused to work in support of a lawsuit (in part against unpaid prison labor) started by a civil rights activist imprisoned in 1972 for inciting a riot during a protest against a white-owned store. They started a prison strike, which spread through the state's prison system, gained nationwide attention and lasted for two weeks.

As during the current prison strike, the Texas prisoners had few illusions of immediate victories. But in 1980, the Texas prison labor system was ruled unconstitutional, and no longer would they pick cotton under overseers for no money. This was one victory in a cen-



Supporters of Florida's prison strike in January 2018.

turies-long struggle; yet Texas has continued to exploit its prisoners for poorly paid work.

Just as the public attention of the 1978 strike contributed to that 1980 decision, so might the current prison strike create changes to the current system of prison labor exploitation. That can happen if we make changes to prison labor systems a central demand of our politicians. The strike will continue until September 9, and it is up to us on the outside to make our voices heard in support of these workers.

Too often, we treat prisoners at outcasts instead of fellow workers. Not only are they stripped of their constitutional rights, but even labor activists do not take their needs seriously as workers. Ending prison labor exploitation—what strike organizers call “prison slavery”—should be at the top of the agenda for the American labor movement, as it is the defining feature of work for the lives of huge swaths of the American working class.

Slavery still has never ended in the United States. It continues every day in our prisons. We must wash ourselves of this moral stain on our society and treat prisoners with the human rights that every person deserves.

Erik Loomis, an associate professor of history at the University of Rhode Island, is the author of the forthcoming book A History of America in Ten Strikes.

—*New York Times*, August 30, 2018

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Born in a Cell

The extraordinary tale of the Black liberation orphan

BY ED PILKINGTON

The placenta was the trickiest part. How to dispose of it without it making a mess that would alert the guards that a child had just been born in a prison cell?

There was no medical equipment, no painkillers, no sterilized wipes or hygienic materials of any sort. When it came to cutting the umbilical cord in the absence of scissors, well, that was the easy part: just use your teeth.

But Debbie Sims Africa was more stressed about the placenta. It was 1978; she was 22-years-old and five weeks into what would turn out to be a 40-year prison sentence.

She was determined to give birth on her own without any involvement of the jail officers so she could spend some precious time with the baby. In the end, a co-defendant helped her out, scooping up the placenta in her hands and secreting it to the shower room where she flushed it down the prison toilet.

The plan worked. Debbie Africa got to spend three wonderful days with her baby son. She hid him under a sheet and when he cried, other jailed women would stand outside the cell and sing or cough to obscure the noise.

She knew it couldn't last, as jail rules prohibited mothers being with their children. At the end of the three days she informed the jailers of the baby's existence and, once they had got over their astonishment, they arranged for the mother and son to be separated and for the child to be taken to the outside world.

So begins the extraordinary life of Mike Africa Jr., a man born in a prison cell, and his incarcerated parents. As he approaches his 40th birthday in September, he reflects on what a crazy ride it's been.

He was born to a mother accused and later convicted of third-degree

murder in one of the most dramatic confrontations with law enforcement of the 1970s Black liberation struggle. Not only was Debbie Africa sentenced to 30-years-to-life for the death of a police officer, so too was her husband, Mike Africa Sr., father to Mike Jr., who was caught up in the same confrontation and given the same punishment.

Which makes Mike Jr. a penal orphan of the Black power movement. For almost 40 years, he visited both his parents in separate penitentiaries but never saw either of them outside prison walls. Last month Debbie was finally released from prison on parole, but his father remains in captivity and to this day he has never seen the two of them together.

Debbie and Mike Sr., both now 62, are two of the Move Nine, the group of Black radicals who were collectively held responsible for the death of Officer James Ramp during a massive police shoot-out at their communal home in Powelton Village, Philadelphia on August 8, 1978. The group, whose members take “Africa” as their last name as a political badge, were resisting eviction.

Move was one of the more extraordinary elements of the 1970s Black liberation struggle. Deeply committed to fighting police brutality in African American communities, they were also devoted to caring for animals and the environment.

They were like the Black Panthers crossed with nature-loving hippies. Black power meets flower power.

They lived in a communal house along with dozens of stray dogs and cats where they would preach their political beliefs day and night at high volume through bullhorns, driving their neighbors to despair. Over time

they came to be seen as dangerous non-conformists by the Philadelphia police and city government, leading to a drawn-out confrontation that culminated in the 1978 siege and gunfight involving hundreds of police that saw the death of Officer Ramp and sent nine of the Black radicals to prison, potentially for life.

The Move Nine were accused of firing the first shot and of killing Ramp. Yet they have always claimed innocence. They deny that they shot at anybody and blame the officer's death on accidental "friendly fire" from other armed police.

Ramp, 52, was a former marine who had served with the Philadelphia police department for 23 years. He was killed by a single bullet. Yet all nine Move members were convicted of his murder.

I met Debbie Africa and her son as part of research into incarcerated Black radicals that began more than two years ago. The starting point was the Angola Three, former Black Panthers who had endured unprecedented stretches in solitary confinement in Louisiana's notorious Angola prison.

That began a journey that would bring me to interview several members

of the Move Nine as well as former Black Panthers and members of the Black Liberation Army who remain incarcerated in some cases half-a-century after their arrests. It would culminate with a day spent with Debbie and Mike Jr., mother and son, as they celebrated their first time together beyond prison walls.

Debbie Africa was eight months pregnant during the 1978 siege. During the shoot-out she was holed out in the basement of the Move house, where she was bombarded by water cannons and tear gas and had to fumble her way out in the dark carrying her first child, her two-year-old daughter Michelle.

No evidence was presented at trial that she pulled the trigger or ever touched a gun. But she was convicted nonetheless as a murderer and conspirator.

Mike Sr. remains behind bars in Graterford correctional institution in Pennsylvania. But last June, Debbie Africa became one of very few Black liberationists convicted of violent acts from the 1970s to be released on parole having convinced the board she was no threat to society.

Debbie and Mike Jr. talked to me at his home in a small town outside

Philadelphia just two weeks after she had been released on parole from Cambridge Springs prison. They were both still clearly awestruck to be in each other's company after so long—Mike's sporadic prison visits to both his parents were nothing like this.

It's the little things that have dumbfounded Mike Jr. most. The first morning after they got back to his house, they were sitting at breakfast wearing no shoes.

"It was the first time I've ever seen her feet, and it was the first time she'd ever seen my feet since I was three days old in her cell," he said.

Debbie Africa described waves of overpowering emotion. "I can't believe this is happening," she said. "I'll just start hugging him in the supermarket and people will be giving us strange looks."

She talked about the wrench of letting her son go when he was three days old. "It was a hard, hard decision. I wanted what was best for him and I knew that was not to get close to me at any level. So I had to break the bond."

Mike Jr. was raised during his childhood by his grandmother and by a succession of different female members of the Move organization as part of its communal ethic. "I was a community kid, I had many mothers," Mike Jr. said in a deadpan voice, as though describing the weather.

Every Mother's Day he makes the rounds of his "mothers." He drives around bearing cards and flowers which he drops off at the homes of at least six women. He rattled off their names: Bert, Sue, Ramona, Pam, Mary, Teresa.

Now he'll be able to put flowers in the hands of his true birth mother. He had no idea who she was, nor who his father was, until he was about six or seven when their relationship to him was made clear to him.

"I didn't know she was in prison, I didn't know any of it. I thought that the person caring for me was my mother."



Move 9 prisoner Mike Africa Sr and his wife Debbie Africa reunited in Philadelphia after 40 years in prison

He looks back on his childhood and recognizes that some aspects of his upbringing were less than ideal. “Who teaches a kid how to brush his teeth or take a bath but his parents. I didn’t know how to wash my hair ’til I was 15.”

Through his childhood he was taken to visit both parents in separate prisons, maybe once or twice a year. But for years he had no idea why they were locked up. When friends at school asked him about them, he would demur or make up stories because he was embarrassed to reveal his ignorance.

It was only when he was 14 and sitting with his father in Graterford that the penny dropped. He asked Mike Sr. whether there was anybody held in the prison who had done something really bad, like killing somebody.

“Yeah,” Mike Sr. replied, “me.”

“He didn’t go on to explain,” Mike Jr. recalled. “I was frightened. Was he going to be in here forever? I was crying my eyes out trying to figure it out, but I couldn’t explain to him why I was crying. I couldn’t put it into words.”



Debbie Africa, one of the radicals who was released June 19, 2018 after more than 39 years in prison, and her son, Mike Davis Africa Jr. Photograph: Mark Makela for the Guardian

Mike Jr. said it took him years to put the pieces together. “I was left to figure it out for myself, to fend for myself.”

But neither son nor mother are ones to dwell on the wounds of the past. I asked Debbie Africa whether she regretted that by her actions as a Black liberationist and Move member she had put her son through so much pain.

“There are always going to be things in my life that I wish didn’t happen,” she said. “I do truly wish that what happened to my son hadn’t happened, I do truly. But I look at the man he is now, and I love it.”

Having spent two days in the company of Mike Africa Jr. outside Philadelphia, I can see what she means. He has turned out remarkably poised for someone with his chaotic childhood *résumé*.

He runs his own small business as a landscape gardener, is married and has four children of his own. He is a proud member of Move, has never owned or even held a gun, and his house is comfortable and full of light, though it was notable how much neater it was the second time I visited following Debbie’s release. At last she has begun fulfilling that ritual of parents everywhere: tidying up after their child’s mess.

On Mike Jr.’s part he’s similarly delighted his mother has turned out as well-balanced, sociable and positive as she is, given 40 years in correctional institutions. “I feel relief. Big relief. I never knew she would come out alive. When people come out of prison they can be sick in the head, but this transition of her coming to my house has been the smoothest major transformation of my life.”

Now the challenge is to help Mike Africa Sr. secure parole, and so complete the family. His next appearance before the parole board is in September, and

they are all already on tenterhooks. [The decision was postponed. —The Editors]

A paradox of Debbie Africa’s release is that under her parole terms she is not able to communicate in any form with her husband because he is classified as a co-defendant and thus is out of bounds. The last time they saw each other in the flesh was in 1986. Since then they had been allowed to write to each other from their cells, and in that way managed to keep their bond alive.

Now that the letter-writing has been stopped all they have in terms of connection is Mike Jr. acting as a go-between. He lets each parent know how the other is doing. He also acted as my go-between, putting questions to his father, which Mike Sr. answered in a phone call to him.

How confident is Mike Sr., I asked, as he heads into the parole hearing?

“I’m confident that I’m going to tell the truth. I’m confident that I deserve parole. I’m confident I would never be considered a danger to the community ever again. We never intended for anyone to get hurt, and regret that anyone did get hurt.”

Then he added: “What I’m not confident about is what they’re going to do, I have no control over that.”

He said the knowledge that his wife was now at home with his son and daughter was a great comfort to him. But it also heightened his desire to be with them all.

“Forty years of wanting, anticipating. It’s like Double Dutch. You’re always on the edge of that jump rope, hopping up and down, waiting to get in, waiting for your turn.”

—*The Guardian*, July 31, 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/31/debbie-sims-africa-mike-jr-Black-liberation-orphan-move-nine-philadelphia>

Life Without Parole

Fighting to end the other death sentence

BY JEAN TROUNSTINE

September 16, 2018—When incarcerated people in 17 states initiated a 19-day prison strike last month, one of their ten demands was that all “imprisoned humans have [the] possibility of rehabilitation and parole.” This includes the opportunity for early release, allowing prisoners both to exit before the end of their sentence and to serve their remaining time in the community.

It also means an end to the harsh sentencing practice known as life without the possibility of parole (LWOP). In an August 26 interview with *MSNBC*, formerly incarcerated activist Darren Mack described LWOP as “death by incarceration,” explaining, “You will not leave prison until you die.”

Noted political scientist and author Marie Gottschalk has called life without parole “death in slow motion.” Pope Francis deemed it “a death penalty in disguise.” Kenneth Hartman, who served more than 37 years in prison before California governor Jerry Brown commuted his sentence, was the first to label it “the other death penalty.” When he was still behind bars, Hartman wrote for *The Marshall Project* that life without parole is “the sense of being dead while you’re still alive, the feeling of being dumped into a deep well struggling to tread water until, some 40 or 50 years later, you drown.”

Across the country, activists inside and outside prison are making headway in organizing to end this harsh sentencing practice. They say more and more people are realizing that the U.S. is an outlier in extreme sentencing. Jonathan Simon, writing in *Life Without Parole: America’s New Death Penalty* by Charles Ogletree and Austin Serat, Jr., explains that the United States, unlike Europe, rejects the role of “dignity” in its sentencing practices. Joseph Dole, cur-

rently serving life without parole at Stateville Correctional Center in Illinois, and the author of numerous articles (several published in *Truthout*) discussed progress against harsh sentencing in a letter: “There has finally been an acknowledgment that long sentences are the main driver of mass incarceration, that people age out of crime and are thus less of a threat when they are older, and that longer sentences don’t deter or reduce crime.”

Ashley Nellis, senior research analyst at The Sentencing Project, a non-profit research and advocacy center, reported in *Still Life: America’s Increasing Use of Life and Long-Term Sentences* (2016), “It is not ‘tough’ to imprison people long past their proclivity—or even physical ability—to commit crime; to the contrary, it is a poor use of resources that could be put toward prevention.”

How we got here

Marie Gottschalk wrote for *Prison Legal News* that in 1913, “a ‘life’ sentence in the federal system was officially defined as 15 years.” Many states at that time had similar rules. But political, social and economic interests pushed for a new system of punishment, wrote Nellis, in her article, “Tinkering With Life: A Look at the Inappropriateness of Life Without Parole as an Alternative to the Death Penalty.”

Thus, by the 1980s and 1990s elevated crime rates and a fear that crime would continue to rise added fuel to the fire. (It did not continue to rise.) Nellis wrote that “The rapid rise in [life without parole] sentences can partly be attributed to a desire for a reliable, terminal punishment to replace the death penalty after it was declared unconstitutional in 1972.” Another way of look-

ing at it, per Gottschalk, is that states rebelled and there was a conservative backlash nation-wide. The Supreme Court, by a series of rulings, essentially opened the door for states to reinstate the death penalty. Today, 31 states allow the death penalty, but life without parole is often the required alternative if a prosecutor doesn’t succeed with his death sentence bid. Gottschalk said death penalty abolitionists helped to “normalize [this] sanction.”

In an interview, Kenneth Hartman, recently released by the California Parole Board that approves or disapproves commutations, said, “All the energy in the room is sucked up by the death penalty abolitionists because they believe we should trade the death penalty for [life without parole].” Of course, not all who believe in ending the death penalty advocate for life without parole, but it is important to note that replacing death with life without parole merely changes what Hartman called “the method of execution.” He said that these “hidden death sentences” mean prisoners must live the rest of their lives in “prisons with extraordinarily high suicide rates, with substandard medical, dental, and mental healthcare, and with scant rehabilitative programs. Prisons rife with gang violence, racism, and despair.”

Research has shown that despite historic crime lows and falling prison figures, the number of people serving life without the possibility of parole sentences has continued to rise, quadrupling since 1992. *Still Life* spelled out that there were 53,290 people serving life without parole sentences as of 2016, *i.e.*, one in every 28 prisoners.

In relation to life without parole sentences, there is also extreme racial disparity: African Americans make up two-

thirds or more of the life without parole population in nine states: Alabama, Illinois, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey and South Carolina. Additionally, a few states are responsible for half the prisoners sentenced to life without parole: Florida, Pennsylvania, California, Louisiana, and the federal system.

There has been some judicial relief, but so far, just for juveniles. In the 2010 *Graham v. Florida* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that sentencing juveniles convicted of non-homicidal crimes to life without the possibility of parole was unconstitutional. In 2012, *Miller v. Alabama* stated no juvenile could receive a life without parole sentence for any homicide without consideration of his or her age. In 2016, *Montgomery v. Louisiana* made the Miller decision retroactive. According to a 2017 *Sentencing Project* report, “States can remedy the unconstitutionality of mandatory juvenile life without parole sentences by permitting parole hearings rather than resentencing the approximately 2,100 people whose life sentences were issued mandatorily.”

Writing in the University of *Miami Law Review*, researchers concluded that most European countries and many others across the globe exist without the “other death penalty,” recognizing that no one is beyond redemp-

tion and that harsh sentencing does not promote public safety.

Organizing to end life without parole in Pennsylvania

“There has definitely been more advocacy on LWOP [life without parole] in the past five years,” Pennsylvania activist Ellen Melchiondo told *Truthout*. She attributes this, in part to the legislative victories for juveniles, the cost of caring for elderly and dying prisoners, and the children and parents of lifers being more engaged in the fight against life without parole. Spearheaded by the Coalition to Abolish Death By Incarceration, which includes Decarcerate Pennsylvania, Fight for Lifers, The Human Rights Coalition and Right to Redemption (an organization of people who are incarcerated at the State Correctional Institution of Graterford,) rallies across the state have been held to end the other death sentence, garnering a lot of media attention. Legislative action is in the offing. Pennsylvania activists are working to pass Senate Bill 942 in 2018-9, which advocates for parole eligibility after 15 years.

The cost of extreme sentencing has also caught the attention of some district attorneys, such as Philadelphia’s Larry Krasner. *The Morning Call* reported that Paul A. Studenroth of Bucks

County, Pennsylvania, now 72, “has been jailed for 54 years, costing \$1.98 million.” Krasner is now rolling out reforms, some related to finance.

It is on-the-ground activists like Melchiondo, a stay-at-home mom earning her Master’s degree in 1996 when she began this work, who are the ones fighting to change minds. Melchiondo found prisoner Sharon Wiggins through a photo exhibit of adults convicted as juveniles, serving life sentences. She understood that Wiggins was sentenced to 44 years in Pennsylvania, close to what the Sentencing Project considers a virtual life sentence: 50 years. They began corresponding, and that led to Melchiondo fighting for women behind bars sentenced to life without parole.

Pennsylvania is second in the nation, following Florida, in the number of prisoners serving life without parole eligibility, reported *The Morning Call* in 2015. While there are 5,371 prisoners serving life without parole sentences in Pennsylvania, only 208 of them are women, what Melchiondo calls a “silent population,” because historically they have been relatively unnoticed by policy makers.

Wiggins tragically died in 2013, before the courts ruled that juveniles should not be sentenced forever. But before she died, she asked Melchiondo to be the megaphone for women behind bars.

In an interview, Melchiondo talked about the difficulty of building a consensus against life without parole among legislators and others in power. She said that in this climate, “I call organization a victory.” Her organizing “lays the groundwork to change minds and practice...to get more people thinking of how to release prisoners” sentenced to life without parole.

She is the co-developer of The Women Lifers Resumé Project of Pennsylvania (WLRPPA), created with Darlene Williams, a mother whose daughter is in



prison. They began the Resumé Project, Melchiondo said, “to highlight the accomplishments of women serving life without parole and change the conversation to what they have been doing.” The WLRPPA solicits letters for support and is “data central” for Pennsylvania legislators, lawyers, and others who seek information about women serving life without parole.

The Resumé Project has served as a tool to help revive the underused practice of commutations, in which a governor (or president, at the federal level) reduces a person’s prison sentence. Marie Gottschalk wrote that “commutations were vital features of the U.S. criminal justice system throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th century...a key mechanism to manage the prison population, correct miscarriages of justice, restore the rights of former offenders and make far-reaching public statements about the criminal justice system.” But signing off on commutations has become extremely political. Gottschalk said, “Between 1967 and 1994, Pennsylvania’s governors and pardon board commuted the life sentences of nearly 400 prisoners.” From 1994 to 2012, only six commutations were granted.

In Pennsylvania, it can take several years for a person’s commutation application to reach a public hearing where the Board votes for or against release of the petitioner. J.P. Kurish, the Press Secretary for the Lieutenant Governor and the Board of Pardons, told *Truthout* that Governor Tom Wolf signed two commutations in 2017, out of 561 he received. (Those two people have been released.) Governor Wolf is currently considering three others, said Kurish.

Five women are waiting for merit reviews from the five-member Board and many more have applied. Melchiondo said that, so far, no woman has had her sentence commuted in 30 years. “That is a conversation starter,” she added. “People are asking, ‘Why not?’”

California on the commutation forefront

California has done much better on commutations than any other state in the country under Governor Jerry Brown, according to activists in New York who are calling on Governor Andrew Cuomo to follow his lead. This is in part due to organizing.

Geri Silva, who founded California’s Families United to end LWOP (FUEL) said in emails that since 2017, Brown has commuted 64 people’s sentences, and of those commutations, 42 serving life without parole had their sentences reduced to 25 years to life. Many have since been released, after having been approved by the Board of Parole Hearings.

One such person, Kenneth Hartman, released in December 2017, began his activism against life without parole while he was incarcerated. He told *Truthout* that “The Other Death Penalty Project came about in 2000, to empower men and women’s voices.” They began by sending out postcards and flyers, aiming at death penalty groups, saying, “You shouldn’t be using us to make your argument against execution.”

Hartman said that 400 copies of *Too Cruel, Not Unusual Enough* were handed out to policymakers, judges, and thought leaders nationwide, “including death penalty abolitionists who argue for LWOP as a ‘reasonable alternative.’” He currently is taking his message to universities and schools around the country.

Geri Silva, also one of the key activists who fights against life without parole, initially founded Families to Amend California’s Three Strikes (FACTS), which fought to amend the harsh law in California. She told *Truthout* that meeting Ken Hartman added to her “radical quest for justice.”

She said, “FUEL began in mid-2017 and has grown significantly over the past year. When people are desperate

for freedom and life, they kick in to make things happen.” FUEL is part of the Fair Chance Project, which is led by “liberated lifers (formerly incarcerated men and women,) prisoners and loved ones of term-to-life prisoners organized around the demand for just sentencing laws and fair parole practices.”

FUEL is also pushing for legislative action, with prisoners’ lives and words leading the way. Silva immediately worked to get about 400 prisoners involved, and their stories are educating legislators. She said now they’re in touch with more than 1000 prisoners.

While she cannot say that the significant number of increases in commutations is directly due to activism, the correlation is certainly there. For example, California mother Lizzy Stewart created a petition for her son to get his LWOP sentence commuted. She garnered 57,000 signatures and sent the petition to the governor. Jeremy Stewart was granted a commutation in 2017 by Governor Brown. Silva believes this is a promising tactic.

Additionally, there has been strong grassroots activism from her group and others like Californians United for a Reasonable Budget (CURB) and the California Coalition for Women Prisoners (CCWP), which started a campaign called “Drop LWOP.” On August 6, more than 100 organizations joined CCWP and CURB to lobby and ask Governor Brown to commute the sentences of all 5000 people serving LWOP in California.

Fighting LWOP behind bars

Mark Wilson, a prolific writer for *Prison Legal News* and *Criminal Legal News* is one of the thousands of incarcerated people who each year become jailhouse lawyers to gain familiarity with the law in their quest to change it or question its abuse. Considering that each state has its own sentencing practices, this means they must spend hours in the prison’s law library. They often begin with their own case and move on

to helping others. Such is the situation with Wilson.

Wilson, in a letter to *Truthout*, described how he was sentenced at age 18, has so far served 32 years in the Oregon State Correctional Institution, and by 20, became what he called a “legal assistant.” While Wilson was not sentenced to LWOP, he wrote, “Oregon’s parole board commonly engages in practices which effectively convert life with the possibility of parole sentences to life without parole sentences.”

He has recently been working on filing cases so Oregon’s prisoners might get the benefit of the recent three juvenile SJC decisions, stating that “Oregon courts have displayed tremendous resistance to complying with the Supreme Court’s decisions.” As of 2017, according to the *Associated Press*, Oregon still has five prisoners serving life without parole and seven persons serving *de-facto* life sentences since they are not eligible for release until they are 65 years old.

Additionally, Wilson said he is filing cases to apply the law to people who were 18 or 19 at the time of their crimes, working with the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, which has crossed the country working to ban juvenile life without parole.

Joseph Dole, an incarcerated writer, also has worked on several legal cases for fellow prisoners to overturn their LWOP or *de-facto* LWOP sentences. However, his main work has been on a campaign to bring back discretionary parole for Illinois, since the state abolished a paroling system in 1978.

**...life without parole is
“the sense of being dead
while you’re still alive,
the feeling of being
dumped into a deep well
struggling to tread water
until, some 40 or 50
years later, you drown.”**

Illinois is one of 16 states, as of April 2018, that sentences people to what are called “determinate” sentences, not allowing for any chance of serving the remainder of their sentence in the community. According to the Chicago non-profit, Restore Justice, “When state legislatures across the nation began abolishing parole in the late 1970s, their rationale was often that parole failed to increase public safety or reduce repeat offenses.... More up-

to-date research now shows discretionary parole can effectively reduce the likelihood of new crimes.” They add, “While not the only factor, the abandonment of parole has contributed directly to increased sentence lengths and more crowded prisons.”

In March 2018, Dole gave a speech to 18 Illinois state legislators on prosecutorial objections to parole. The speech was published in the *San Francisco Bay View*. Sadly, Dole’s program, the Justice Debate League, was suspended a few weeks later. But he has continued his activism.

Paroleillinois.org, which was developed by people in and out of prison, is up and running, providing resources, highlighting stories, detailing policy, and fighting tooth and nail for the future. The prisoners were also able to introduce legislation they wrote on the issue to lawmakers at the debate. The name of the bill illustrates their commitment to ending harsh sentencing: The Transformative Release Bill.

—*Truthout*, September 16, 2018

<https://truthout.org/articles/fighting-to-end-the-other-death-sentence-life-without-parole/>



Lying With a Straight Face

BY KEVIN COOPER

Death Row, San Quentin, California—“There are no innocent people on death row in California.” Those were the words of San Bernardino County District Attorney Michael Ramos when he appeared in TV commercials to urge voters to pass Proposition 66 on the November 2016 ballot to speed up executions in California.

The measure passed, but his words were not true.

Many conservative, right-wing, death-penalty-supporting politicians, law enforcement personnel and just citizens want so badly to believe this untruth. I remember when conservative right-wing columnist Debra J. Saunders (who seemed to be the lone Republican on the *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper editorial pages before she left the newspaper in 2016) used to quote California Governor Jerry Brown in many of her pro-death-penalty speeches or columns by saying, “Jerry Brown told me that there are no innocent people on death row.”

Saunders, now a columnist for a Las Vegas newspaper, was not the only one to whom Brown expressed that opinion. When he was attorney general, in a letter June 30, 2008, to then-chair John Van de Kamp of the Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice, Brown wrote, “I know of no defendant facing execution who is innocent of the crime for which he was convicted and sentenced.”

He may not have known of any, but that does not mean they don’t exist. From 1981 to 2018, four men sentenced to death in California were exonerated, the latest being on Brown’s watch this year. They were all innocent. A 2014 study for the National Academy of Sciences reported that, nationally, 4.1 percent of death row inmates are innocent. For California, that would mean that about 30 people of the 747 currently

on death row are not guilty of the crimes for which they were sentenced to die.

Most recently, the California Supreme Court ruled in the case of Vicente Figueroa Benavides, a man who had been living on death row in the state of California for 24 years, that he was convicted with false evidence. The Kern County district attorney refused to retry this case, and in April of 2018, Benavides was walked off San Quentin prison grounds and into the arms of his family and attorneys, a free man.

The California Supreme Court filed its opinion on this case in March of this year, and I have not heard a peep out of the mouth of Ramos, Saunders or any of the other death penalty supporters, or to use the words of University of San Francisco Law School professor Lara Bazelon, “innocence deniers.” Neither did Brown correct his past statements.

Any person with common sense would know that there have to be innocent people on death row and in prison, if only because this modern-day planta-

tion and death camp is run and controlled by human beings who, by their very nature, make great mistakes, and some of them are also corrupt. We know for certain Ramos, Saunders, Brown and others—who ever said there are no innocent people on death row in this state have been proved wrong.

Truth be told, and this is the case in any circumstance, “if there’s one, there’s more”—and that is a fact. Kern County is a conservative Republican county, just like San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego and other counties with high death penalty convictions in this state. What happened to Benavides is not an isolated incident; it can’t be. Every inmate on death row in this state went through the same legal process that Benavides went through, and if false evidence was used against him, then false evidence may have been used in other death row inmates’ cases.

My case

Look at my case. I was convicted with false evidence by the San Bernardino



San Bernardino District Attorney Michael Ramos discusses his opposition to abolishing the death penalty at a 2012 press conference.

County Sheriff's Department and district attorney's office. Who is the district attorney of San Bernardino County presently? Michael Ramos, the same man who stuck his face in front of a TV camera and lied with a straight face when he said that there are no innocent people on death row. (He will only be in office through December 31, as he was ousted by voters in June.)

Most Americans say they don't trust politicians, nor do they trust the government. They say there is too much government, and they do not want the government to tell them what to say, think or believe. This is the Republican way of thinking when it comes to politicians and the government, whether state or federal.

Yet at the same time they refuse to acknowledge that certain politicians like Ramos, for example, are telling them who should live and who should

die. They also claim the criminal justice system is so perfect there are no innocent people on death row, so you do not have to worry about an innocent person being tortured and murdered in your name by the government.

This is an American political narrative, to lie with a straight face to achieve an objective, which, for the most part and historically speaking, is to oppress the people deemed as "the other" in this divided country—especially the poor people who fill up these modern-day plantations and death rows. In doing so, they drown out the voices of the people who they want to either keep in prison or murder. So, when people like me in places like this scream out at the top of our lungs that we are innocent, people like Ramos, Saunders, Brown and others can put their hand on a Bible and swear in the name of God that there are

no innocent people on death row, and that any death row inmates who say they are innocent are lying.

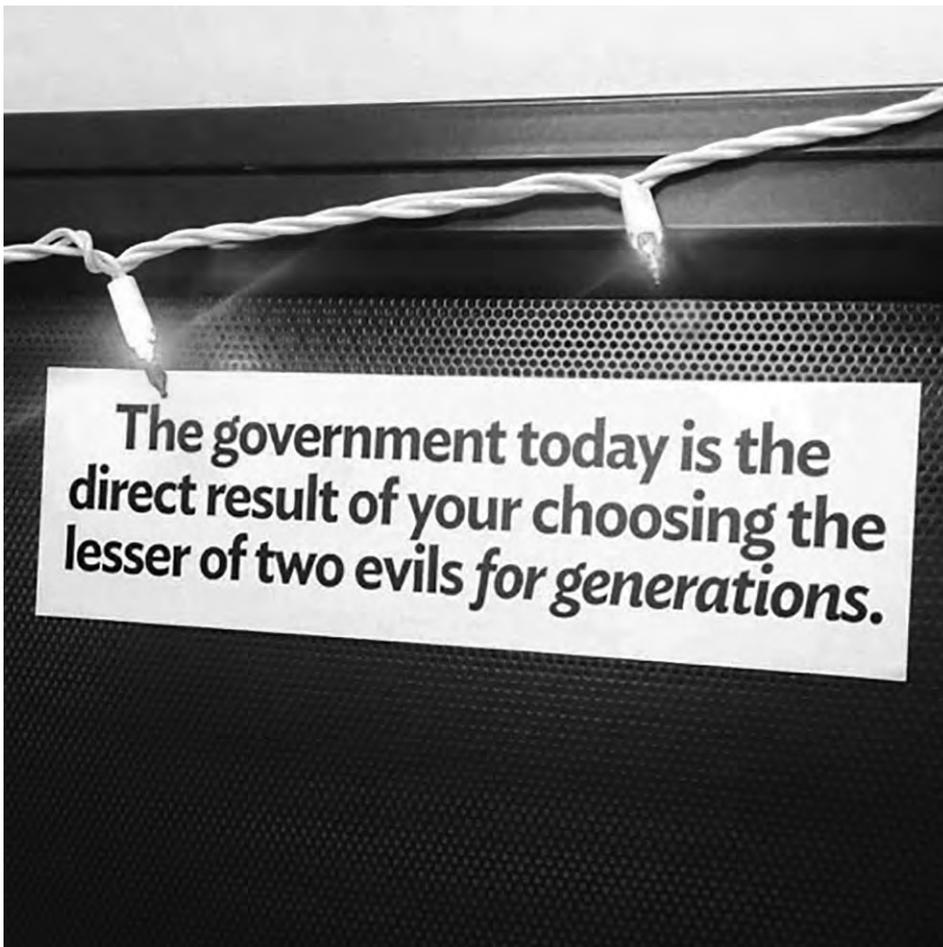
And who are you, Mr. and Mrs. Society, going to believe: an elected district attorney or a convicted murderer? You need not even look at the "false evidence" or the prosecutorial misconduct or any of the other constitutional violations that may have happened, because you believe the government and its keepers do not lie.

The injustices that are happening all over this country, mostly to people of color and the poor, can no longer be ignored. Police misconduct is being reported across the country, in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Orange County, California—everywhere. There are many people who are standing up, speaking out and fighting back against these injustices, while people like Ramos and others don't want to admit these injustices exist. But they do.

To continue to lie about them with a straight face does great harm not just to individuals wrongly accused and prosecuted but at a cost to the integrity of a criminal justice system that has to work for all. Those same types of political liars back in the day said with a straight face there were "happy slaves" and "slavery was the best thing that could ever have happened to Black people." While I am a modern-day slave, I damn sure am not happy, nor were my ancestors. Like them, I am innocent, and I just want to be free, and that is no lie.

—*Truthdig*, September 4, 2018

<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/lying-with-a-straight-face/>



Our Shared and Tortured History

BY KEVIN COOPER

Phone call to Death Penalty Focus event, September 23, 2018

The late James Baldwin stated that history is far from a dead thing:

“We carry it with us. We are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways. And history is literally present in all we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frame of reference, our identities and our aspirations.”

I, Kevin Cooper, would like to add these following words to the above truthful statement from James Baldwin:

We must include the Death Penalty, and overall oppression of poor and minority peoples to this equation, in that we are taught—or certain people are taught—from history, how to hate, oppress, and execute other certain people who have historically been looked

at and deemed different. This is especially true when throughout this country’s tortured history, and present day reality, those poor and minority peoples who are deemed to be different are the only ones who this country’s leaders strap down to chairs and gurneys and torture and murder in the name of justice, god, and “the people.”

Our shared and tortured history and present-day reality must first be acknowledged and then brought to an end as other crimes against our collective humanity have been.

But, in order to do this, it’s going to take all of us!

Understanding our history in this country is important, especially in our present day reality with Trump in the White House. He wants to make America great again—according to him that’s the mean history, the history that James Baldwin says is not dead, but is with us today.

In Trump’s reality, poor and minority people are worthless, and just like in real history, it is poor and minority people who Trump is against—those who historically have been oppressed, tortured and executed.

We can’t forget this history, or present-day reality, because if we do, America will stay as sick in these times as it was in those times!

Kevin Cooper is an innocent man on San Quentin’s Death Row in California. He continues to struggle for exoneration and to abolish the death penalty in the whole U.S. Learn more about his case at: www.kevincooper.org

Write to:

Kevin Cooper C-65304, 4 EB 82

San Quentin State Prison

San Quentin, CA 94974

www.freekevincooper.org



Artwork by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson

Prison Labor is Modern Slavery

I've been sent to solitary for speaking out.

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

August 23, 2018—This week, a nationwide strike was launched across U.S. prisons that has the potential to become the largest protest of incarcerated men and women in the history of this country.

It's a move that is of personal interest to me, as I sit in my solitary cell in a maximum-security prison in Virginia. I've been in touch with several of the strike organizers in other prisons, and though my communications are limited under the restrictions of my confinement, I'm doing all I can to open the American public's eyes to the abuses that go on behind bars.

Until the strike ends on September 9, 2018, I will be joining a boycott of the commissary—I will not be parting with any money so that prison companies can make profit out of me. I'll also be supporting fellow inmates here and across the nation who will be refusing to work in what amounts to a modern form of slavery.

On July 10, 2018, I was moved to Sussex state prison in Waverly, Virginia, and placed in a cell on death row. I have never been sentenced to the death penalty, so there can be only one reason they have put me here—to shut

me up and prevent me fraternizing with other prisoners as they fear I will radicalize them and encourage them to resist their oppression.

I see prison labor as slave labor that still exists in the United States in 2018. In fact, slavery never ended in this country.

Three death row prisoners—the last in the state of Virginia—occupy cells near mine. The prison authorities have ordered them specifically not to talk to me, but I'm heartened that the other guys don't seem minded to pay any attention to that injunction.

That's been the pattern of my incarceration for the past many years. I resist; they retaliate.

I have always refused to perform labor inside prison, ever since I was convicted of murder in 1990 when I

was 18-years-old. (I have consistently challenged my conviction on grounds that I was subjected to a misidentification and am innocent.)

I see prison labor as slave labor that still exists in the United States in 2018. In fact, slavery never ended in this country.

At the end of the civil war in 1865 the 13th amendment of the U.S. Constitution was introduced. Under its terms, slavery was not abolished, it was merely reformed.

Anybody convicted of a crime after 1865 could be leased out by the state to private corporations who would extract their labor for little or no pay. In some ways that created worse conditions than under the days of slavery, as private corporations were under no obligation to care for their forced laborers—they provided no healthcare, nutritious food or clothing to the individuals they were exploiting.

Though I've always refused to engage in this modern slavery myself, I've witnessed plenty of examples of it. The most extreme were in Texas and Florida, where prisoners are forced to work in the fields for free, entirely unremunerated.

They are cajoled into chain gangs and taken out to the fields where they are made to grow all the food that inmates eat: squash, greens, peas, okra. They are given primitive hand-held tools like wooden sticks and hoes and forced to till the soil, plant and harvest cotton.

They are watched over all day by guards on horseback carrying shotguns. Elite posses of prisoners are used to keep other prisoners in line, through open coercion and violence.

Prisoners who do not agree to such abject slavery are put in solitary confinement. I know from personal experience.



Apart from six months when I was in general population in Oregon, I have been held in isolation cells with-out pause since 1994.

That hasn't prevented me speaking out about the appalling conditions inside U.S. prisons. I've helped other inmates file wrongful death lawsuits after prisoners were killed by guards. I've seen prisoners beaten by guards, starved, have their property systematically destroyed.

I was held in Florida prisons at a time when current and former guards were found to be card-carrying members of the Ku Klux Klan

Racial animus is always present. The state that now incarcerates me, Virginia, has a general population that is 19 percent African American, but 58 percent of its prison population is Black.

A few years ago I was held in Florida prisons at a time when current and former guards were found to be card-carrying members of the Ku Klux Klan. On a personal level, I've been called a "rebellious nigger" too many times to mention.

Because of my refusal to work, and the efforts I've made to organize strikes and publicize the horrors that go on behind bars, I have faced regular reprisals. In recent years I've been bounced around from state to state in an attempt to silence me: they sent me from Virginia to Oregon, from there to Texas and Florida, then back again to Virginia.

Now I'm on death row, even though I'm not a death row prisoner, which is about as total a condition of isolation as you can get. Yet I still found a way to get this article to the *Guardian*.

Will I face reprisals for writing this column? Sure I will. Do I fear such reprisals? I am far past the point where threats concern me.

In the past three decades I have endured every level of abuse they have to offer: I have been starved, beaten, dehydrated, put in freezing cold cells, attacked with attack dogs, rendered unconscious, chained to a wall for weeks. There's nothing left to fear.

Kevin "Rashid" Johnson is co-founder of the New African Black Panther Party. He is serving a life sentence.

—*The Guardian*, August 23, 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/23/prisoner-speak-out-american-slave-labor-strike>

Editors Note:

On October 18 we learned that Rashid was transferred to Sussex II and put into horrendous conditions, including: attack dogs lunging at him while he was fully chained up; being served meals on a rubber mat, without utensils, or cups, so made to eat with his hands; being placed in a filthy cell with blood in the toilet; no toilet paper or other hygiene products.

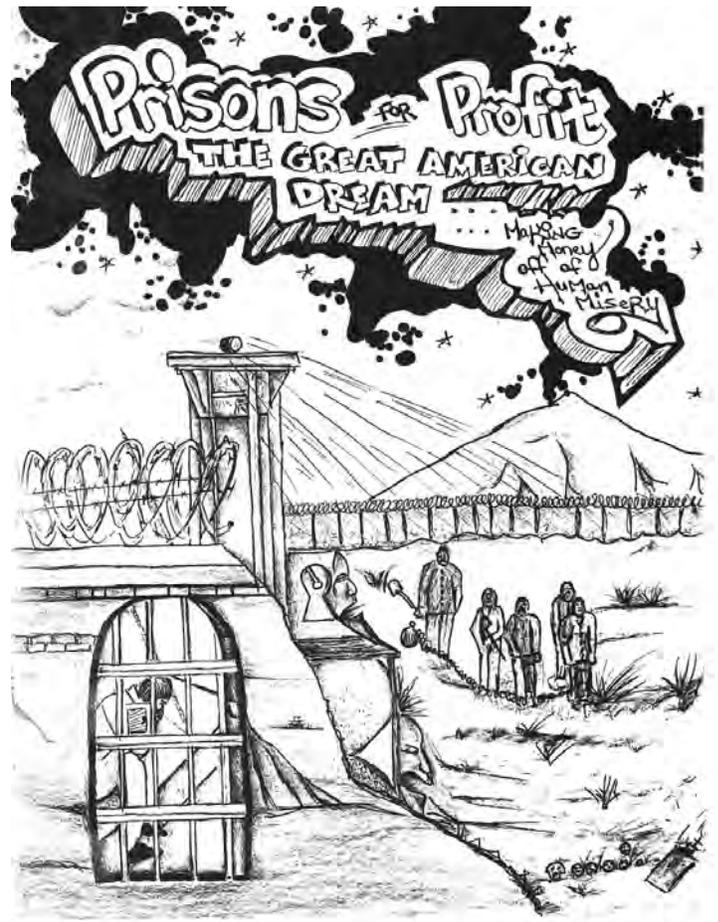
He refused meals because he wouldn't eat in such filthy conditions. He was in his cell with a guard standing in front of it 24 hours per day. Cells on either side of his were empty so he couldn't communicate with other prisoners. Most seriously, he was not given his blood pressure medications and his requests for medical assistance went unanswered.

Protests to the Warden at Sussex II resulted in Rashid's transfer back to Sussex I, but as of November 1, 2018, Rashid is about to be transferred again out of the Virginia Department Of Corrections to an as yet unknown prison destination.

For more up to date information: krj.nabpppc@gmail.com www.rashidmod.com

Write:

Kevin Johnson, #1007485
Sussex II State Prison
24427 Musselwhite Drive
Waverly, VA 23891
krj.nabpppc@gmail.com
www.rashidmod.com



Heroic or Heinous: The Death Penalty Case of Thomas Porter

BY KEVIN "RASHID" JOHNSON

Who is Thomas Porter?

Thomas Porter is a 42-year-old Black man held on Virginia's Death Row for the October 25, 2005 shooting death of a Norfolk, Virginia cop, for which he was charged, tried and convicted of capital murder.

His is a case that warrants close and broad public attention and action.

At his trial, it was undisputed that the cop walked up and grabbed him

around the throat without warning, then tried to throw him to the ground. Thomas reflexively pushed the cop back, asking what he was doing. Without warning or explanation the cop pulled his gun and fired on Thomas but missed.

In a split second reaction, Thomas pulled and fired his own gun, fatally hitting the cop in the head—a clear case of self-defense—and particularly

so, where the long-standing epidemic of U.S. cops murdering Black males is now common knowledge.

But of course no laws recognize the murderous impunity of police towards men of color, nor any right to defend one's life against such violence. Consequently, Thomas was convicted and sentenced to die for defending from being murdered by a cop.

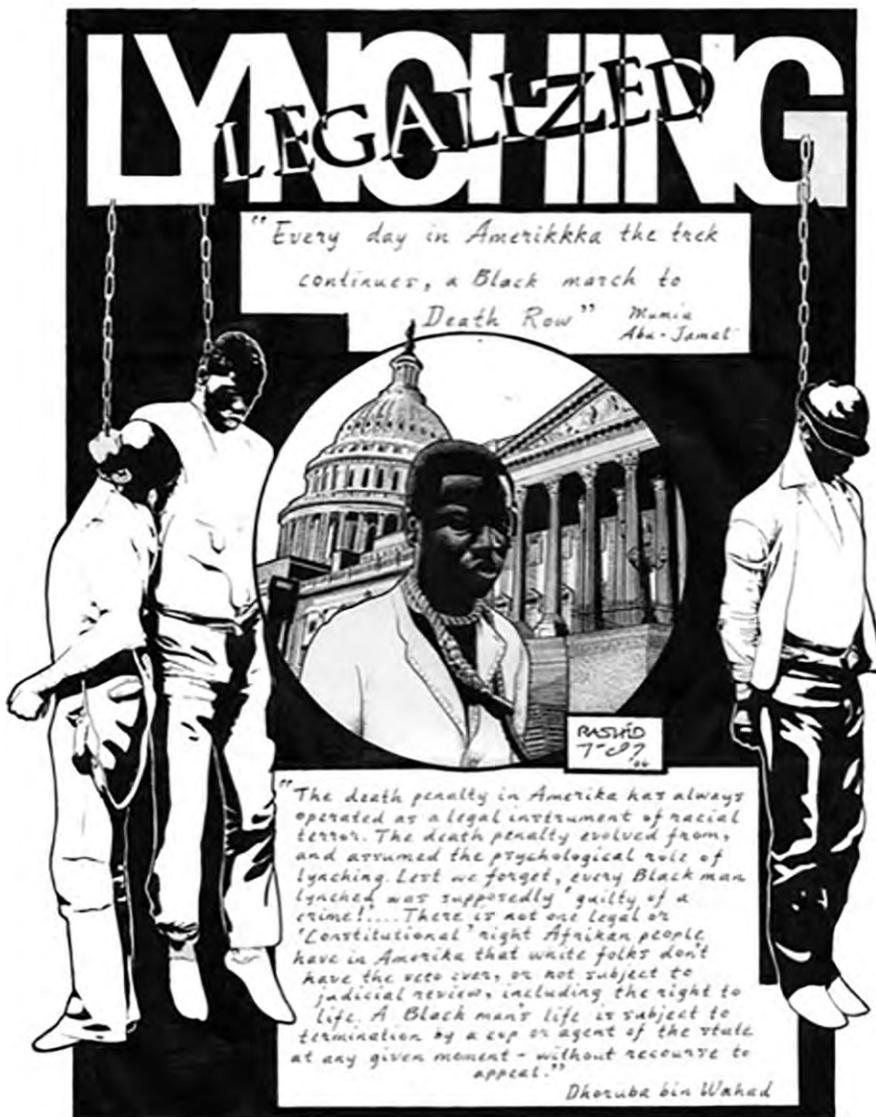
Comparing apples and...apples

Now contrast his treatment with the recent "stand your ground" murder of a Black man, Markeis McGlockton, outside a Clearwater, Florida convenience store.

On July 19, 2018 Markeis was in the store with his five-year-old son. When he came out, he observed his girlfriend and two other children being harassed by a white man, Michael Drejka, because they were parked in a handicapped parking spot. Markeis confronted Drejka and pushed him away from the car. Drejka then pulled a gun and killed Markeis, who was unarmed and was walking away.

Florida officials declined to prosecute Drejka, finding that Florida's "stand your ground" law (the same that exonerated Trayvon Martin's killer) allowed Drejka to "defend" himself—despite [the fact] that he'd previously threatened to kill another Black man over a disputed parking spot.

In Drejka's case, a white man killing an unarmed Black man who pushed him—because he was menacing his family—and walked away, was justified "self defense," but not so in Porter's case, where a Black male (a member of a social group routinely targeted for police murder) killed a cop who attacked and tried to shoot him without warning, provocation, reason or explanation. Instead Thomas was pros-



Artwork by Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

ecuted for capital murder and sentenced to death.

At trial, Thomas explained his response to being attacked by the cop. He described a lifetime of witnessing cops menace, brutalize and murder Black men, and his very real fear of suffering the same fate at the hands of a cop who sneak-attacked and in fact tried to kill him. All to no avail.

This is because in Amerika the police have assumed the role of violent impunity, containment and terror against Blacks that was previously exercised by slave patrols during the antebellum era, and by the Ku Klux Klan and similar white terrorist groups during the period of Jim Crow, against which Blacks were forbidden to defend or resist.

How many Black and Brown males in Amerika would still be alive if they'd had the presence of mind to defend themselves against murderous police attacks? But, like lynchings, cases like Porter's are meant to vindicate a corrupt system and deter Black and Brown self-defense. To send a message that in Amerika people of color must submit to the whims of murderous police.

Like in the recent cop murder of a 31-year-old Black man, Thurman Blevins, who was gunned down by Minneapolis, Minnesota police on July 23, 2018 as he fled in fear for his life while begging not to be shot. And of course prosecutors quickly announced that the cops who killed him wouldn't be charged.

Porter still stands his ground

Before I met Thomas Porter (when Virginia prison officials devised

to house me on Death Row since July 10, to isolate me from others even though I have no death sentence,) I had the opportunity to read rulings and pleadings in a federal lawsuit he'd brought challenging Virginia's holding its death row prisoners in permanent solitary confinement.

His suit brought about the eradication of solitary on Death Row in Virginia and set a standard to be followed in other solitary confinement cases (See *Porter v. Clarke*, Case No. 16-7044, U. S. Appeals Court, 4th Circuit, March 24, 2017.)

Before filing the case Thomas was warned by attorneys that he'd likely suffer retaliation by prison administrators and a rush to carry out his death sentence. In the interest of asserting the rights of all Virginia's death row prisoners, Thomas "stood his ground." He filed the lawsuit and won the changes he sued for. As a result, he was met with the very retribution he was warned about—he has suffered repeated physical abuse at the hands of officials, and at the time of the writing of this article, he expects an execution within two to three months. Yet he has remained undeterred.

One can only admire his backbone and tenacity, in the face of repeated attempts to take his life, first by a murderous cop, and then by the state for protecting his own and others' rights to live, and to humane treatment.

The fight for one's basic human entitlements—especially to defend one's life—are among the most fundamental human rights. And those who uphold this right, as did Thomas Porter, in a society like Amerika, which violently forbids these rights to those it continues to subject to brutal containment and oppression, are heroic in their own right.

Such a system should not be allowed the second chance to murder Thomas Porter, nor to validly criminalize Black and Brown self-defense against murderous police.

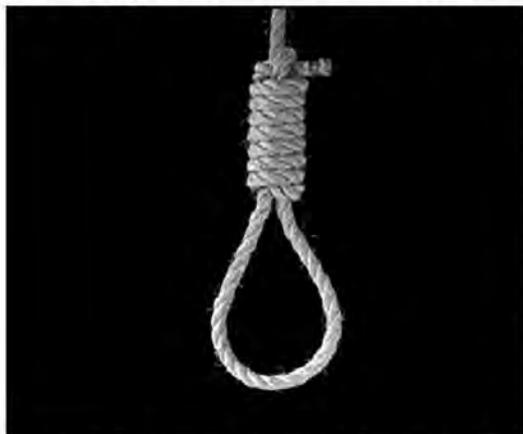
Dare to struggle—Dare to win!

All Power to the People!

Write to:

Thomas A. Porter #1072240
Sussex I State Prison
24414 Musselwhite Drive
Waverly, VA 23891

Georgia's Death Penalty: A Century of Progress



Georgia's solution 100 years ago to the problem of an innocent black man convicted of murder by perjured testimony.



Georgia's 'enlightened' and 'humane' solution to the same problem today.

Speaking from the Inside

Inside the South Texas Gulag—McCconnell Unit Ad-Seg

By KEITH “MALIK” WASHINGTON



Keith “Malik” Washington

Revolutionary Greetings Comrades! Today is August 26th, 2018. I’m holding on, not sure if my pleas for help are making their way out. Things keep on getting progressively worse here.

I arrived here on June 25th, 2018. I was classified a Level 1 in security class and a 5-4 Line Class in excellent standing, with nearly two years clear disciplinary record.

In fact, I was actually released from ad-seg on the 21st of June, 2018.

I walked the prison hallways of Ramsey I Unit in Rosharon, Texas for one single day!

Y’all should have seen all the hugs I received from Muslim brothers and other well-wishers who hadn’t seen me in person for a few years. It sure felt good—one day of quasi-freedom. Then I was literally kidnapped! Texas initiated an extra-judicial rendition program against me on U.S. soil!

Sisters and brothers, what is going on here at McConnell Unit is a well-coordinated, highly illegal, and malicious campaign to retaliate against me for filing civil lawsuits—but that ain’t all!

The relentless human rights and abolition works that I’ve been doing with the help of some very dedicated anarchist collectives throughout the U.S. and Europe, along with my comrades at Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee and Industrial Workers of the World—well folks, I’ve been labeled Public Enemy #1!

When I first arrived here, Senior Warden Philip Sifuentes kept moving me just about every three days—F-61, B-79, F-45, and then the torture chamber F-82! F-82 was badly smoke damaged with black soot, and it became a burning hell-fire inferno at night when that cement releases a torturous thermal attack on your body—it hurt me.

I am so very thankful for all of the phone calls and emails y’all made on my behalf to get me moved downstairs to F-74. It’s far from comfortable, but I will survive! I always do! Thank Allah!

I’d like to give a special revolutionary salute to Comrade Julie Schneyer of the awesome Blue Ridge ABC Collective in Asheville, North Carolina. Julie gave the corrupt and unethical Warden Sifuentes an earful—regularly! Her work, coupled with the radio support from the *Final Straw Radio*, made one helluva difference, but we got a lot more work to do!

I’m being isolated and silenced! I’ve tried to send out pleas for legal help and mail room supervisor Janet Salles and STG (Security Threat Group)

Sergeant Joe D. Mireles have been literally picking specific letters to throw away! My mail is being blocked!

On July 5, 2018, I was convicted of attempting to solicit help from Professor Victor Wallis for ending a lengthy essay about my conditions with the words “On August 2st we rise.”

When I tried to appeal this bogus case, Unit Grievance Investigator Jessica Garcia “lost” my grievance—corruption! I’ve reached out to Julie Schneyer and Calvin Burnap about this and still no response—it’s been weeks since I wrote them, something is wrong!

I don’t feel safe here, comrades! When the oppressors start intercepting your outgoing mail, that is a big red flag—it spells DANGER! Can y’all hear me?

I hope y’all can get me moved from this place! Obviously this entire move was a set-up. I’m strong, but not invincible. Something unjust and illegal is going on here!

Dare to struggle, dare to win, all power to the people!

Keith “Malik” Washington is co-founder and chief spokesperson for the End Prison Slavery in Texas Movement, a proud member of the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, an activist in the Fight Toxic Prisons campaign and deputy chairman of the New Afrikan Black Panther Party Prison Chapter. Read Malik’s work at ComradeMalik.com.

Write to:

Keith “Malik” Washington, #1487958
McCconnell Unit, 3001 South Emily Drive
Beeville, TX 78102.

Prisoners in Danger

The national prisons strike is over. Now is when prisoners are most in danger.

BY HEATHER ANN THOMPSON

Over the last few weeks men and women across the United States—and even as far away as Nova Scotia, Canada—have protested to demand humane treatment for the incarcerated.

In 2016, when prisoners engaged in similar hunger strikes, sit-ins, and work stoppages, their actions barely registered with the national media. As someone who regularly writes about the history of prisoner protests and prison conditions today, this lack of interest was striking.

This time around, though, prisoner demands to improve the conditions of confinement have captured the attention of reporters everywhere. Coverage can be found in such major newspapers as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Popular magazines such as *GQ* and *Teen Vogue* have also published pieces.

All seem to sense that American prisons may well be descending into crisis, so perhaps it is time to start paying attention.

That our institutions of confinement are in a state of emergency is, in fact, not new. When prisoners tried to tell us this when they erupted in 2016, it was perhaps still possible to imagine that the abuses they suffered might soon be addressed by a seemingly robust bipartisan criminal justice reform effort in Washington, D.C.

Today, however, with Donald Trump in the White House and Jeff Sessions heading the Department of Justice, it is much harder to conjure up such optimism. News of seven horrific prisoner deaths at Lee Correctional Facility in South Carolina last April made it quite clear that corrections officials are still failing to ensure prisoner safety and haven't made the conditions inside their institutions any less

brutal. This time, with politicians so noticeably less vocal about this vital issue, prisoners alone are calling the public to action.

That their determination to be heard is finally striking a chord, is good news for our nation.

Our responsibility

Prisons and detention centers exist and operate in the name of the public good. Americans want to believe these institutions make our society safer by upholding the rule of law.

Yet, as those locked up keep telling us in the most painful and graphic detail, these places are barbaric. They do far more harm to society than good. These are places where men, women and children are placed in solitary confinement for periods considered torture by medical experts.

These are places where human beings are fed too little, are denied access to basic medical care, and are raped, abused and even killed.

These are places where children behind bars are increasingly isolated from their parents, and where parents

behind bars find it almost impossible to connect with their kids, thanks to companies who charge usurious rates for calls, and push states to allow only “video visitations.” These myriad abuses take place in taxpayer-funded institutions, and can only happen because the public is utterly shut out.

And so, it is indeed positive that the media is finally shining light on what prisoners need in order to survive their time. They need “immediate improvements to conditions of prisons and prison policies that recognize the humanity of imprisoned men and women,” and also an end to prison slavery as well as real rehabilitation programs.

Prisoners also want an end to severe racial discrimination evident in our nation's policing practices, laws and sentencing guidelines. And they are calling for the rescinding of 1996's Prison Litigation Reform Act, which has made it difficult for prisoners to seek legal help.

But what happens next is also critical.

It is when the headlines fade, and prisons once again slip from the public's consciousness that prisoners are in the most jeopardy.



Inmates Push for Voting Rights

BY ED PILKINGTON

Consider the brutal aftermath of the Attica Prison Uprising in 1971, when nearly 1,300 men took over that facility in upstate New York to call the nation's attention to the inhumane conditions inside. As the state moved in to retake the facility, state troopers shot 128 men and killed 39 prisoners and hostages alike. Countless other men were then tortured.

Or consider the reprisals experienced by prisoners in facilities such as Michigan's Kinross prison in 2016.

And, of course, there is what the men in South Carolina's Lee Correctional are enduring even now as you read these words—lockdowns 24/7 in six-by-eight-foot cells, insufficient food, and lack of basic and desperately needed medical care.

The fact is that men and women behind bars are in most danger in the days, weeks and months after they have dared to protest.

It is the responsibility of anyone who has voted for prison construction in their communities to know what happens in those institutions, particularly since this country has locked up more people in the last 40 years than ever before in its history—more than in any other country. We must pay attention to which companies benefit from such a harsh criminal justice system, and recognize the devastatingly high price that certain communities have paid for that same system to exist. And, because it ensnares so many of our most vulnerable citizens, we must insist that those inside be treated lawfully and humanely.

Heather Ann Thompson is Professor of History and Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan. She won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize in History for her work Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy.

—Portside, October 1, 2018

<https://portside.org/2018-10-01/national-prisons-strike-over-now-when-prisoners-are-most-danger>

Inmates within America's overflowing prisons marked the end of a 19-day national prison strike on Sunday, September 9, 2018, with a new push to regain the vote for up to six million Americans who have been stripped of their democratic rights.

The strike was formally brought to a close on the anniversary of the 1971 uprising at Attica prison in upstate New York. Though details of the protest have been sketchy since it was launched on August 21, 2018, hunger strikes, boycotts of facilities and refusal to carry out work duties have been reported in many states, from Florida and South Carolina to Washington.

Now that the strike has ended, organizers hope its momentum can be sustained as they attempt to fulfill their demands including the restoration of the vote. Not only does the U.S. have the world's largest incarcerated population—2.3 million are behind bars—it also harbors at state level some of the harshest felony disenfranchisement laws in the world.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, 34 states bar citizens from voting based on past convictions. Kentucky, Florida and Iowa cast anyone with a felony out of the democratic process for life.

Prisoners are beginning to coalesce around the push to regain the vote as a means of forwarding the cause of prison reform. The effort is led by Jailhouse Lawyers Speak, a loose network of imprisoned women and men who were at the forefront of the national prison strike.

When the strike was launched, its organizers put out ten demands. The tenth was that "voting rights of all confined citizens... must be counted. Representation is demanded. All voices count."

Eddie, a prisoner who has served 13 years of an 18-year sentence for armed robbery in South Carolina, said that when he is released in 2023 he will be effectively ostracized.

"I will pay taxes but I won't be able to vote," he said.

Speaking on a clandestine phone from his prison cell, Eddie, who asked not to give his proper name to avoid reprisals from authorities, said disenfranchisement condemned prisoners to the status of second-class citizenship.

"It lets me know that I'm not truly a citizen," he said. "I will have no say in the political process or the direction of the nation."

Eddie is one of the organizers of Jailhouse Lawyers Speak involved in coordinating strike action. He said that in his prison most activity had focused on boycotting facilities that generate cash for the prison service, such as commissaries and vending machines in the visitors' room.

There had also been widespread refusal to work in his and other South Carolina penal institutions. The striking inmates see the obligation of performing prison work for minimal or no pay as a 21st century form of slavery.

In response, Eddie said, South Carolina maximum-security prisons had been held in a state of lockdown throughout the strike.

"They have suspended all recreation so that we are in our cells literally 24/7," he said. "They turn back our mail, threaten anyone found to be associated with the strike with solitary, and they've painted windows in our cells black so we have no idea whether it's night or day."

Such intimidation failed, he said, to dampen spirits or dissuade inmates as

they plan future actions. Of those, one of the key efforts he said will now be around voting rights.

Other retaliatory moves have been reported against prominent prisoner activists and strike organizers. Kevin Rashid Johnson, who wrote an opinion piece for the *Guardian* at the beginning of the prison strike, had been summoned to appear on Monday, September 10, 2018, in front of the authorities in Sussex state prison in Waverly, Virginia, where he is currently being held in solitary confinement.

Johnson has been told that he faces transfer to a different penitentiary, following a pattern in which he has been moved around the country from prison to prison, from Virginia to Oregon, Texas, Florida and back to Virginia. “This is a form of retaliation,” his attorney, Dustin McDaniel, said. “The authorities object to the way he exposes injustices inside the system and that he does political education work with other prisoners, and so they move him around to try to neutralize him.”

While strike leaders are primed for further retaliatory measures, they are also developing the campaign to restore voting rights. Janos Marton of the American Civil Liberties Union Campaign for Smart Justice, which aims to cut the U.S. jail and prison population in half, said a renewed focus on felony disenfranchisement was one of the main achievements likely to flow from the past 19 days of actions.

“Organizing across states for the strike has mobilized prisoners as a unified voice to an extent we have never seen before,” he said.

Marton added: “The most tangible impact of that amplified voice after the strike ended was a specific effort over voting rights.”

The issue of the removal of the vote from millions of prisoners is likely to be a hot button issue during the mid-term elections in November. In Florida, voters will be asked as a constitutional amendment whether they want voting rights to be restored to people with felony convictions who have fully served their sentences and completed parole or probation.

Florida is traditionally one of the most finely balanced and important swing states, with the potential to decide presidential elections. Donald Trump won there in 2016 with a major-

ity over Hillary Clinton of just 113,000 votes. If voting rights were restored, some 1.5 million Floridians would be brought back on the voting rolls.

In other states, Republican officials have been aggressively applying disenfranchisement laws to the extent of sending former inmates back to prison simply for trying to vote.

In Texas, Crystal Mason is now serving ten months in federal prison after she cast a provisional ballot in the 2016 presidential election. She faces an additional five years from the State of Texas. She was not aware at the time that as a former felon, she was prohibited from voting.

—*The Guardian*, September 9, 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/sep/09/us-prison-strike-lat-est-demands-voting-rights>

<p>Crystal Mason of Texas voted in 2016 without realizing she was disenfranchised due to a felony</p> 	<p>Terri Lynn Rote of Iowa tried to illegally vote for Donald Trump twice</p> 
<p>JUDGE SENTENCED HER TO 5 YEARS IN PRISON</p>	<p>JUDGE GIVES HER PROBATION AND \$750 FINE</p>

Nationalism or Internationalism?

The question is posed by the Russian Revolution

BY CHRIS KINDER

Part 2

“...the problem of our century is to free the productive forces from the national boundaries which have become iron fetters upon them.” —Trotsky

In Part 1, (Socialist Viewpoint, September/October 2018, Vol. 18 No. 5) we discussed how the Russian Empire, known as a prison house of nations, became, with the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, a workers state, which respected and honored national liberation and self-determination of all nations. The Bolsheviks renounced the Tsarist Empire’s expansionist goals, and exposed the infamous secret treaties in which the imperialist powers of World War I had plotted new colonial conquests. The Bolsheviks recognized the independence of previous Tsarist possessions such as Finland, Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic states, even as many of these were occupied by German imperialists. But the Bolsheviks had a big “caveat:” while national rights were respected, counterrevolutionary efforts to destroy the Russian workers state, or to stop the spread of workers revolution internationally, would be (and were) resolutely opposed.

Soviets reject imperialist designs, but the entente? Never

Under the Tsars, Russia had worked to extend its tentacles into the declining Ottoman Empire, including wars in the Balkans, wars against the Turks of Anatolia, and a joint plot with Britain to dominate Persia (now, Iran.) All this was walked back under the Bolsheviks, who renounced all Tsarist aims at domination in the Middle East. The Soviets made public the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, in

which Britain, France and Tsarist Russia had secretly agreed on dividing up the Middle East between them. France claimed Syria and Lebanon, while the British demanded Iraq, Persia, and also a “protectorate” in Palestine, this latter being part of a Zionist plot to establish a Jewish state under colonial protection (British troops conquered Jerusalem during the war a year later.)

The Tsar claimed Constantinople (now Istanbul)¹ and the Straits of Bosphorus and the Dardanelles—the connection between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (hereafter, the Straits.) This was important for Russia’s access to the world market, and later also became a factor for defense of the young Soviet state.

The imperialist designs of Sykes-Picot had been dependent, of course, on the victory of the imperial Entente powers over the Central Powers, which included the crumbling Ottoman Empire. That victory is what happened in general, in 1918. In one instance however, this dying empire had decidedly refused to crumble. During the war, the British were seriously humiliated when Churchill attempted to outflank the Germans in the trenches in Europe by invading Turkey. This led to the battle of Gallipoli—a major disaster for the British. Gallipoli was the only victory of the Ottomans in World War I, and it presaged Turkey’s later emergence as an independent state, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the victorious general of Gallipoli.²

The Entente: imperialism *uber alles*

Turkey soon became an important test for the young Soviet state, and it

was not an easy one. For the Soviets, the relations with the Turks in the post WWI period are a prime example of how the Bolsheviks confronted a multifaceted problem: to reconcile defense of liberty for colonized nations against imperialism, with the defense of minority rights within those nations, the promotion of world revolution, and also with the survival of the Soviet state itself in an imperialist-dominated world. Increasingly in this world, the proletarian revolutions it had expected and depended on in Europe had not come to pass. The Soviets were thus often faced with some difficult decisions, particularly regarding the national and colonial question.

First and foremost, the problem began with the imperialists.

The British, in partnership with France, Italy (which had opportunistically switched sides during the war from the Central Powers to the Entente) and some client states, proceeded with their thirst for domination in the Middle East after the war’s end in 1918. Despite their loss at Gallipoli—or perhaps because of it—Britain and its allies targeted Turkey particularly for dismemberment. At the Treaty of Sevres in August 1920—to which Soviet Russia was not a party, since it had earlier made peace with the Ottomans—the map of Turkey was butchered. Sections were slated for British-allied Greece, as well as so-called “zones of influence” for Italy, France and Britain. Sections were also allotted for a future Kurdistan and for the British-aligned Armenians, both of whom occupied parts of Western Anatolia.

These plans for Turkey were all about defeating and colonizing the Ottoman

Empire, and had nothing to do with the “Wilsonian” idea for self-determination of oppressed nations such as the Kurds and Armenians. U.S. President Wilson’s pandering to “self determination” was all about preserving imperialist control, in a new form perhaps, in the face of the danger of world revolution emerging from Soviet Russia.

Turkish War of Independence and Soviet response

Under the 1918 Armistice of Mudros (also without Soviet participation,) the Entente had asserted its right to control Constantinople and the Straits in the name of “free trade,” thus displacing the now deposed Tsar’s demands with those of the imperialist victors. This soon allowed imperialist warships to freely sail into the Black Sea to supply the White armies of Denikin, whose counterrevolutionary forces pushed into the Ukraine after the withdrawal of the German occupiers in 1918, and were only defeated by the Soviets in 1920.

After the 1920 Sevres Treaty, and with British and French control in Constantinople (still the seat of the Ottoman Caliphate,) Turkish nationalists led by Atatürk rose up in rebellion against both the Sultan and the imperialists. With British support and advance planning, Greek forces were used as the spearhead of the imperialist attack. They landed on the west coast of Anatolia (in Ionia, which in ancient times had been Greek) in March 1921, presenting Turkish nationalists with a big military problem. They requested Soviet help.

The Soviet predicament in 1921

For the Soviet Russian government, this represented both an opportunity and a challenge: the British, once seen as a protector of Turkish nationalism against its own Ottoman government during the war, was now a mortal enemy, just as it had been the Soviets’ worst enemy. And the Greek-British

assault on the Turks, now a new nation emerging from the wreckage of the Ottoman Empire, was an imperialist crime of the first order. The Soviets supported Turkey’s nationalist aspirations, yet hesitated. The decision to support the Turks with armaments was made after a few months, based on internal discussions in which Lenin and Trotsky supported intervention, and Stalin opposed. The Greeks were driven out, and the Atatürk regime was grateful. A Soviet-Turkish Treaty was signed in March of 1921.³

Why did the Soviet government hesitate in backing Turkey against Greek/British imperialist aggression? The answer is not simple. Russia, just emerging from civil-war hell under war communism, had to survive in the face an economic collapse. The blockade imposed on Russia had, with the defeat of most of the White counterrevolutionaries, been lifted in January 1920; and Russia was now in negotiation for a trade agreement with Britain. Also in 1921, a renewal of small capitalist production under the NEP, or New Economic Policy, was instituted in order to kick-start the economy.

Furthermore, this was a world in which the prospects for world revolution were waning, particularly in the Middle East. Communist Parties in Turkey and the rest of the Middle East were recently formed, very small, and imperial powers were on the move to subordinate any and all incipient nationalisms to their control.

“A state of equilibrium” —Lenin

In an address to the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in December 1921, Lenin referred to this period as one of a “state of equilibrium:”

“...a certain equilibrium, though a highly unstable one, has been created in international relations....It is very strange for those of us who have lived through the revolution from its inception...”

Lenin goes on to say that the direct, Bolshevik path of revolution,

“...which, in fact, alone had enabled us to break free of imperialist ties, of imperialist crimes and of the imperialist war continuing to threaten the rest of the world, proved to be one which other nations were unable to take—at any rate not as quickly as we had thought they would. When nevertheless, we now see...that there is only one Socialist Soviet Republic and that it is surrounded by a whole array of frenziedly hostile imperialist powers, we must ask ourselves—how was it possible for this to happen?”

Lenin went on to assert the basic correctness of Bolshevik analyses, conclusions and policies, and credited,

“...the sympathy of the workers and peasants...throughout the world, even in the countries most hostile to us...”

This sympathy,

“...was great enough to be the final and most decisive source, the most decisive reason for the complete failure of all the attacks directed against us.”⁴

This report to the Soviet Congress by Lenin represented a frank and honest appraisal of the situation facing the world’s first workers state. Lenin recognized an existing situation—that revolution had failed to spread as expected—and asserted that the Russian Soviets had to survive in this context without compromising on principal. Lenin’s approach to the problem of the isolation of the Soviet state in a capitalist world was the opposite to that of the later betrayals of Stalin, who subordinated the revolutionary interests of the working class to the strictly diplomatic interests of Russia.

National liberation alone is not enough

In supporting national self-determination, the Bolshevik government insisted on full cultural and autono-

mous rights for all minorities in any nation, including local languages to be used in schools, *etc.* This of course was anathema to nationalists; especially those who sought to escape the influence of the Russian Revolution. But the Bolsheviks were unable to influence events in Turkey.

The Soviet-aided national liberation of Turkey from both the Ottoman Empire and from the encroachments of western imperialism led to a new state, but it was a national revolution, not a social revolution, and it did not lead to liberation for the Kurdish or Armenian minorities living in Turkey. The Kurds were Muslims, but the Armenians, besides being a very ancient people, were also among the first to adopt Christianity (in about 300 AD). During the World War, some 1.5 million Armenians in the Turkish areas of the Ottoman Empire were massacred by the “Young Turks” in the military, or forcibly expelled into the Syrian desert, in racist and genocidal attacks (mainly in 1914-15). This atrocity was blamed on the war.⁵

The Soviet government was of course not around at the time of this atrocity. After the war, however, and after the departure of Entente forces from the Trans-Caucasian states of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, Turkey became a predator against Trans-Caucasian Armenia. Turkish nationalists had expansionist aspirations. This nearly caused an armed conflict between the Turks and Soviet Russia

The Kurds meanwhile, an ancient people, deserving of the right of national self-determination as much as any of the peoples of the Ottoman Empire, were promised self-determination by the imperialist powers after the war. They were then denied a national state by the same powers. Turkish independence disrupted the imperialist plan to butcher Turkey as the first step in dividing up the Middle East. Subjected to endless persecution in Turkey (and Iran), Kurds were left to making deals

where they could. Now Kurdish nationalists have subordinated themselves to the U.S. in the Syrian conflict. Such is the endless entanglement of small nations in the imperialist web.

Revolution spreads to the Trans-Caucasus

In the Trans-Caucasus, the Armenian, Azerbaijan and Georgian nationalities all went through the same unfolding dynamic as did other Russian borderlands: Russian speaking elites at first supported working with the Provisional Government Constituent Assembly, and then, after the October Revolution, fled to the help of various imperialists and White armies to escape Bolshevism, and to gain a highly dubious independence. These nations were led by Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary governments and protected by imperialist and White intervention, which could only have led them into new colonization by the Entente powers, who were frothing at the mouth to gobble up and divide the Middle East—including the Trans-Caucasus—between them; and to destroy the workers’ revolution in Russia as well.

The Bolsheviks meanwhile, pursued the class war against both the imperialist, and the local reactionaries. Soviets were emerging, particularly in places such as Baku, a Russian dominated industrial area in Azerbaijan. Pro-Bolshevik workers’ uprisings soon began in these nations, and with Red Army support, they triumphed.

In the Trans-Caucasus, the Soviet struggle against the Entente imperialists also led to new socialist states as well as to both friendly relations with Turkey, and to some essential interests of Russia as a nation. In the spring of 1920, after the departure of British troops, and after the British recognition of a state of Azerbaijan (which was an attempt to maintain British influence and act as a bulwark against the Soviets) a communist uprising quickly overthrew the government and established the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).

Armenian workers revolt, and a significant treaty with Turkey

Soon after, this revolution was matched with an uprising of workers and peasants in Armenia, but this was suppressed. The Dashnak government of Armenia was in the process of colluding with Denikin, the White reactionary who assaulted the Ukraine. (Dashnak was a nationalist “socialist” party aligned against the Bolsheviks.) By September, the Turkish attack on Armenia (mentioned above) hit the Bolsheviks just as they were dealing with the assault by Wrangle (yet another reactionary White army) on Southern Russia. Russia publicly denounced the Turkish incursion, and the Turks soon relented.⁶

At the end of November, a revolutionary committee backed by a Red Army detachment proclaimed an independent Armenia, called an Armenian Congress of Soviets, and proclaimed an Armenian socialist republic. While Soviet-Turkish negotiations were ongoing, Soviet and Georgian Bolshevik forces also crossed the border into Georgia, and established the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, with autonomous rights for three minority regions, while bourgeois and Menshevik politicians fled. Lenin had proposed a joint government with the Mensheviks but they refused. Lenin’s objections to Stalin’s treatment of Georgia is a subject for a future article.⁷

The Russian-Turkish Treaty signed in March 1921 accomplished a great deal. It recognized the three Trans-Caucasian Soviet republics (each making separate treaties with Turkey,) recognized Georgian control of the port of Batum (which had been contested by Turkey,) and it recognized Turkish control of Constantinople, and thus of the Straits. With this Treaty, the Straits and all shores of the Black Sea were protected from foreign military intervention, while free trade through the Straits was assured for all nations.

Bolshevik principles

In sum, the experience of Soviet Russia regarding Turkey, in which they were unable to intervene in Turkey with revolutionary struggle or with protecting persecuted minorities, is not different in principle from the dealings with Finland and Poland. Finnish workers rose up, but a revolutionary civil war was lost to a German-aided bourgeoisie; and Poland's workers failed to rise up in sufficient numbers when the Red Army invaded in 1920. Yet Russia recognized the independence of both nations. As for Turkey, which unlike Finland and Poland, was never a Russian possession in any sense, the Soviets allied with and supported Turkey against imperialists who were still threatening Turkey with dismemberment, and the entire Middle East with colonization.

Meanwhile, the creation of workers states in the Trans-Caucasus, (as with the Ukraine and Belarus,) was based on national liberation in the context of struggle against imperialist occupiers, and for the revolution's survival in the civil war and after. True liberation of the masses meant overthrowing the exploiter class, not just achieving a dubious national independence. As we have seen however, this could not happen in all cases, and revolutionary tasks were left for the future.

In September 1922, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International issued a declaration of "Peace to the Turkish People, War on European Imperialism." It contained the following summary of the situation concerning Turkey:

"The Turkish Government is not a government of workers and peasants; it is a government of the officer class, a government of intellectuals, a government which certainly does not correspond to our ideals. There is therefore no doubt that as Turkey develops economically the Turkish

working class will have to fight against the government. But the Turkish workers understand that, whatever their attitude to this government, Turkey's fight is that of a poor peasant people against enslavement by international capital, and the international proletariat must in its own interest and regardless of its attitude to the Turkish government, do everything it can to prevent Entente imperialism from taking up arms again against Turkey and from shedding the blood of the European proletariat once more in the interests of English world domination."⁸

On the question of "cultural nationalism"

What about minority populations integrated within nations... are they necessarily potential nations? Many are, yes. But in the years before the war, Lenin polemicized against the notion of "cultural national autonomy," which was promulgated by leading Austrian Social-Democrats in connection with the many national minorities collected within the Austro-Hungarian Empire (in 1914 the Empire contained ten nations and at least as many ethnic groups.) This proposal, as Lenin described it in an article titled "Cultural-National" Autonomy, would have allowed any citizen, without regard to territoriality (*i.e.*, what national territory they lived in) to register as a specific nationality. This proposal, Lenin emphasized, would require separate schools for each nationality.

In Russia, this proposal was adopted by the bourgeois Jewish organizations (the Bund, and others,) and Lenin vigorously objected. He pointed out that Jews could be divided into two groups, those that lived in backward areas like Galicia and Russia, where they were forcibly confined in ghettos and frequently massacred in pogroms, and those who live in the civilized world, who tend to be internationalists and revolutionaries in great numbers. And Lenin also mentioned the Negroes of

America: "In the Southern, former slave states of America, Negro children are still segregated in separate schools, whereas in the North, white and Negro children attend the same schools." Allowing for the fact that Lenin did not mention the segregation due to economic circumstances and racism in the North, the point against misplaced nationalism is clear.⁹

After the Revolution, the Communist International was the chief, and very determined force in educating socialists in the U.S. as to the need to see that there was a special oppression of the Negroes that must be addressed. Prior to that, socialists had seen the Negro question as a simple economic one. Lenin requested that the American, John Reed, speak on the Negro Question at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International in 1920. Reed pointed out that while the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had organized Negroes, the old Socialist Party "undertook no serious attempt to organize them," and in some states refused membership to them. He emphasized that integration and multi-racial workers struggle, along with armed self-defense against "race riot" attacks by whites, was the only way forward. "The Negroes do not pose the demand of national independence," he said.¹⁰ Only later, after the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution, did the Communist Party in the U.S. toy with notions of a separate Black Nation.

The Leninist revolutionary national program today

The Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution dealt with the national question as it was affected by counterrevolutionary elements backed by imperialist powers. Today, while the world has no revolutionary force such as the Bolsheviks on hand, the same dynamic still applies: national self-determination is important, but it does not, by itself, constitute liberation from the class

oppression of the bourgeoisie, or from rampant imperialist domination

In the post-World War II period, the U.S., asserting its new found dominance among imperialists, taught the world's nations a lesson: yes you can have your post-colonial nation with your own flag and postage stamp, but your country will still be ruled by puppets that we choose, and by international finance capitalism centered in Wall Street. In short, it meant that nationalism is in no way a solution to capitalist or imperialist exploitation, why? Because we imperialists will dominate your economy in a vice-grip of debt and subordination to our will through financial controls.

Financial control was always the heart of capitalist imperialism. But abandoning physical occupation of colonies, and substituting client states run by puppets—in which the imperialists appear to be in the background and the nations appear to be independent—is the hallmark of the new “American Century.”

Crimes of the new sheriff

African peoples emerging from colonialism were the first victims of this new approach to empire, post-World War II. In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the nationalist leader of post-(British) colonial Egypt, nationalized the Suez Canal. Both British and French imperialists freaked out, and with client state Israel, occupied the Canal to regain control of this important waterway. The U.S., under Eisenhower (with Stalinist Soviet Russia and the UN,) called a halt, defended the Nasser regime, and in effect told the French and British that there was a new sheriff in town.

These new means did not exclude financing counterrevolutionary forces, murderous CIA interventions or outright invasions with troops. In 1960 in the formerly Belgian Congo, Patrice Lumumba was executed in a CIA plot in the newly-formed Democratic

Republic. The purpose of this action was to halt Lumumba's attempt to seek aid from Soviet Russia, and thus to preserve access to the Congo's vast resources for imperialist corporations..

Yugoslavia is another variant. Yugoslavia emerged from a victorious war against Nazi occupiers to form a unique, if deformed, workers state: one, which united several Balkan countries, which for centuries had been endlessly warring. After the death of its head, Josip Tito, imperialist powers managed to crack this state up into its historically nationalist components, which provoked war and mayhem in the region. Nationalist divisions resurfaced, but anything that could be called “liberation?” Nowhere to be found.

The lessons of Central and South America

Central America is another story of national disaster. While the Bolivarian Revolution had liberated Latin American nations from Spanish colonialism, big brother from the North declared, with the Monroe Doctrine, that this is our back yard. And while the U.S. toyed with occupation ideas in Central America in the past (many of which were all about spreading a slavery economy,) today it is all about banana republics ruled by puppets and corporations, from United Fruit to the Clintons' friends in Haiti. Military *coups* sponsored by the U.S., as well as countless military interventions are all part of the story, which can only reaffirm that having your own flag and postage stamp is not enough!

National self-determination is still relevant

The working class seeks a worldwide regime of human community, speckled only by equal local national groups and ethnic communities. But the right of national self-determination must not be consigned to the history books just yet: its importance is still current under capitalism. In the Russian annexation of

Crimea, a referendum was held which is widely denounced in the West. Yet the population of Crimea is overwhelmingly ethnically and linguistically Russian, and the referendum's outcome was clearly supportive of joining Russia.

Catalonia and Quebec, however, are questionable (in a different way.) Catalonia has voted to secede, and so revolutionists support that, and condemn the Spanish government's contemptuous attempts at suppression. But what does the working class have to gain? Quebec is another story, in which nationalists advocate independence but do not hold a majority. Furthermore working-class unity has been demonstrated between the French- and English-speaking populations.

Britain, and the illusions of nationalism

The British vote for Brexit—separation from the European Union—is a conundrum. While the EU is a capitalist cabal, based on free trade and domination by the wealthiest nations, the principle of operation by any and all of its member states is essentially the same for all. Some powers in the cabal dominate due to their greater control of capital, but the principal contradiction within the European Union is the class struggle.

Yes, many workers in Britain simply wanted to throw a monkey wrench into the works of the system, just as some workers in the U.S. did with Trump. But the retreat of a powerful member state such as Britain, or Trump's reactionary populism in the U.S., represent no alternative to capitalism. Brexit, like Trump, represents a resurgent, anti-immigrant nationalism which banks on a highly unlikely revival of imperialist domination (Britain) or an equally unlikely “great” America benefitting workers. These are illusions, which many British and U.S. workers have fallen victim to.

Regardless of the right of self-determination—important as it is under both capitalism and in a workers

state—the actual outcome of so-called “national liberation” of former colonies in the Third World has been an unmitigated disaster. And in the world of advanced imperialism, that was to be expected. The nation state was the tool the bourgeoisie used to come to power in an environment in which it could dominate as a class, and pursue its interests on the world stage. Warfare developed between states while the primary market was at home. But soon the mercantile empires that enriched the nascent bourgeoisie became full-blown capitalist imperialism, in which the market is increasingly on a world stage.

As Lenin pointed out, finance capital dominates the world, the economy is a global phenomenon, and therein lies the chief contradiction: built to foster national capitalist economies in the 19th Century, nation states are now the chief obstacle to the development of a truly international and egalitarian economy. The nation states are now a reactionary hangover from an earlier age, yet the dominant imperialists use them to keep to keep themselves in power, and the other states in low-wage subservience. Labor is exploited globally to the benefit of the big corporations, imperialist centers keep most small nations in perpetual poverty, wars and chaos; and border walls and barbed wire keep the victims of brutal oppression from seeking refuge in the very countries whose rulers are the cause of all their problems.

Nationalism and imperialism mean racism, reaction and war

Those few—Venezuela, Nicaragua—that buck the system are isolated and persecuted in a thousand ways. Either they accommodate the big powers, or they lie prostrate before corrupt puppets or “regime change.” But they are all, technically, “independent” nations. At least Cuba, having overthrown capitalism has a better chance at survival. But without an international proletarian revolution, even Cuba could succumb

Nationalism, like the religion it goes hand-in-hand with, is increasingly showing its reactionary tendencies. In the U.S., Trump’s rightist populism spurs white supremacy and works to turn the clock back to the 1950s, and anti-immigrant fever increasingly grips the U.S. and Europe. Huge numbers, all victims of imperialist policies of one sort or another are drowned, deported, or simply kept out by walls and barbed wire. In India, a Hindu supremacist/nationalist autocracy is taking shape, which will inevitably mean more slaughters of Muslims.

Humanity yearns for imperialism and the myth of nationalism to fade, and return to the dustbin of history from whence they came. The Russian Revolution showed the way to that long-term goal. Now, it is our turn to make revolution happen again, worldwide.

Trotsky said it best:

“It is a question here not of Russia alone. This subordination of belated national revolutions to the revolution of the proletariat follows a law, which is valid throughout the world. Whereas in the nineteenth century the fundamental problem of wars and revolutions was still to guarantee a national market to the productive forces, the problem of our century is to free the productive forces from the national boundaries which have become iron fetters upon them. In the broad historic sense, the national revolutions of the East are only stages of the world revolution of the proletariat, just as the national revolutions of Russia became stepping-stones to the soviet dictatorship.”¹¹

1 Constantinople—named after the Roman Emperor Constantine, who officially imposed Christianity on that Empire—was ironically still the formal name of that city under the Islamic Ottomans. “Istanbul” was an informal Greek-derived sort of nickname, which became official in the 1920s under the Turkish nationalists.

2 The Battle of Gallipoli was one of the worst in this war, both for the British, and from the perspective of the atrociousness of World War I generally. With closely spaced trenches atop a

cliff, ineffective artillery support from British ships offshore, and rigid, unrealistic battle plans, the soldiers in the trenches paid the ultimate price for the idiocy of an arrogant British military elite. Australian troops were the primary cannon fodder for the British; their losses were huge, and many Australians retain a hatred for Churchill and for the British generally which persists to this day.

It says something about the corruption of the imperialist hegemonic nations that Churchill, the architect of this disastrous adventure, later became the much-celebrated Prime Minister in yet another world war, in which he ordered terror bombings of civilians.

3 Stalin and Orjonikidze urged moderation, “recalling Turkey’s unfriendly attitude in seizing Batum (Georgia’s port on the Black Sea, where Stalin had organized strikes before the revolution) in February 1921 and not wishing to see Turkey too strong.” E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, Vol. 3, Pelican Books, 1973, pp. 468-69.

4 Lenin, Report on “The Home and Foreign Policy of the Republic,” to the Ninth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, December 25, 1921. *Collected Works (CW)*, Vol. 33, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1966. pp. 143-44.

5 The ancient peoples of Armenia were in recent times located in Eastern (Trans-Caucasian) and Western (Anatolian) regions. The former came under the control of the Russian Empire, while the Western Armenians came to be dominated by the Ottoman Empire. Western Armenians had earlier been subject to persecution by Turks and Kurds to convert to Islam. See: Suny, Ronald Grigor, *They Can Live in the Desert, But Nowhere Else*, Princeton University Press, 2015, for more on the Armenian Genocide.

6 Kemal Atatürk’s aim was partly to grab some territory, but also to prod the Soviet government to ally with Turkey against the imperialists, who through control of the Trans-Caucasian republics and Constantinople, sought to dominate the Black Sea and thus control Russia’s trade route.

7 See EH Carr, *ibid*, Vol. 1, pp. 352-54; and Vol 3, pp 250-52 on the Trans-Caucasian Republics.

8 Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International Documents*, Volume 1 1919-1922. p. 370.

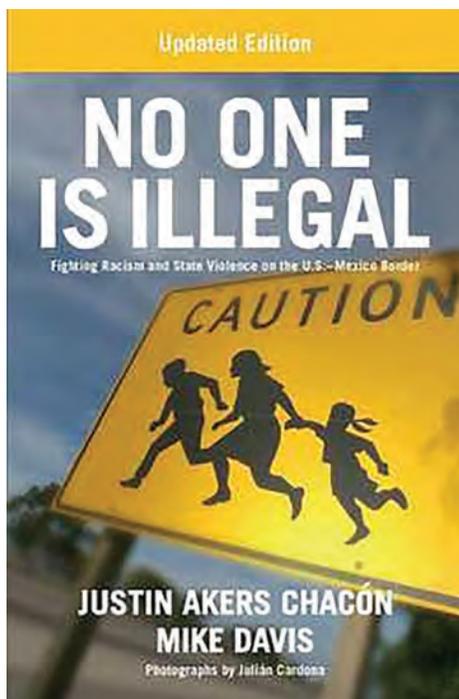
9 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 19 (1913), p. 503; and “Critical Remarks on the National Question,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 26.

10 “John Reed Speaks on the Negro Question in the 2nd Congress of the Communist International, 1920,” www.marxists.org/history/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm#v1-p121.

11 Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Haymarket Books edition (2017) p. 655

Immigration Nation

BOOK REVIEW BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL



Say one thing about the Trump presidency. From day one, issue one has been immigration.

More specifically, the issue has been American anxiety about the rising tide of immigrants—especially Mexican or other “nonwhite” immigrants.

Several days ago, I’d been reading *No One Is Illegal* by Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis (Haymarket Books: Chicago.)

I’ve learned new things on virtually every page, especially the harrowing history of how the U.S. treated immigrants over the years.

The history of the U.S. is largely seen by the demand for workers from China, Japan, the Philippines, and later, Mexico. They would be invited, welcomed, super-exploited by growers, and then they would be demonized by politicians and media, to be assaulted, insulted and eventually deported.

These workers were paid a mere pittance. Some—like the Chinese—were spit upon in the streets by white ruffians and vigilantes. Some were beaten. Some were killed.

When Mexicans came North to take these jobs—some by way of the U.S. Bracero Program—they were isolated and separated from others, so that they could more easily be exploited. They were signed up to work by contracts,

and once that ended, they were deported back home to Mexico.

They essentially feed the U.S. nation—for pennies—only to be demonized, isolated and forbidden to unionize (and when they tried to do so, immediately arrested and deported!)

The hardest working gets the lowest wages—sound familiar?

The struggles of migrant workers in the U.S. are truly eye opening.

It ain’t pretty, but it gives us a lot to learn.

That U.S. history ain’t shown at the movies.

Those stories have yet to be told.
—*Prison Radio*, August 24, 2018

Write to Mumia at:
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Do you see law and order? There is nothing but disorder, and instead of law there is the illusion of security. It is an illusion because it is built on a long history of injustices: racism, criminality, and the genocide of millions. Many people say it is insane to resist the system, but actually it is insane not to.

— Mumia Abu-Jamal —



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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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No U.S. Troops to the Border!

On the Front Cover: Quote from Martin Luther King in a letter he sent to Coretta Scott in 1952. Read *Climate Change: What About the Marxists* on page 36. ▶



Protesters took a knee on October 30, 2018 in opposition to President Trump's hypocritical visit to Pittsburgh, PA after the massacre of 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue on October 28.



Maurice Stallard, Sr. and Vickie Jones, victims of white supremest killer at Kroger grocery store in Louisville, KY on October 24, 2018.



Attention Prison Mail Room:



Prisoners retain their free speech rights under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. That means you cannot legally suppress the expression and consideration of ideas. Prison walls do not form a barrier separating prisoners from the protection of the Constitution, according to the *Turner v. Safley* ruling. [482 U.S. 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987)] If you exclude printed matter on an improper basis, or give a false pretext or rationale for its exclusion, because of the ideas expressed in it, you are breaking the law. The prisoner denied access to material he wants to read can bring a civil rights lawsuit against you with cause for seeking punitive damages. In the case of *Police Department Chicago v. Mosley*, 408 U.S. 92, 95, 92 Sct 2286, 2290 (1972) the court found that “[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, subject matter or content.”