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SocialistViewpoint

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

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Needed: A Working Class Party

What are the first steps to build one?

EDITORIAL BY THE SPARK

September 20, 2026— The Democrats came into this election thinking they would turn the population's growing anger with Trump into a vote for themselves.

And there has been anger—about inflation, about the war on Iran, about gas prices, about tariffs, about a trade war with Canada—even about Trump's new plaything, a monster ballroom, for which he tore down almost a third of the White House.

For almost a year, polls show anger eroding Trump's support, going lower than ever before.

But there is a fly in the Democratic Party's ointment. In some polls, its numbers are even lower than Trump's. John Anzalone, a pollster who works for the Democratic Party, had this to say: "The Democratic Party brand is so bad that they don't have the credibility to criticize Trump and the Republican Party."

The fact is, big parts of the population are fed up, really fed up, with both of the two big parties.

With good reason. Those two parties, Democrat and Republican, direct a political system that is stacked against ordinary people.

The big majority of the population did not want this war against Iran. But we have it.

The majority of the population did not want U.S. money going to pay for wars in the Middle East and in Africa. The majority did not want money going to keep a war continuing between Ukraine and Russia.

But money was spent anyway. Under Obama, under Biden and under Trump, money was taken from schools to be spent on war.

The big majority of the population do not want a trade war with Canada, throwing the U.S. into conflict with our closest neighbor. But we are caught in one, anyway.

The majority of the population do not want vicious attacks on immigrants who have been working here for years, taking care of patients in nursing homes, paying taxes, being a valuable part of our neighborhoods, but ICE has been rounding people up anyway.

We made none of these decisions. Before they were carried out, we weren't informed. We weren't consulted. We definitely weren't asked for our opinions.

We have no way to express ourselves. We aren't organized politically. The working class is without its own party. It's like being in a boat with no rudder, unable to steer it where we want it to go.

We need to organize ourselves politically. We need our own

party, a party that doesn't exist today.

But it could exist. People like us could begin the work to make it exist.

There needs to be a nucleus of people who take the first step.

They would face the truth, that neither of the two big parties represent working class people. They would refuse to give their votes to either of those parties. They would advocate for the working class to build its own party.

Today, in Michigan, Maryland and Illinois, there are some people who have done exactly that. They worked to put a party on the ballot called Working Class Party. In California, a non-partisan campaign called for the same thing.

Working Class Party—the name is a slogan, standing for what needs to be built: a party that represents the working class, and not only during election time.

Working Class Party—the name is a perspective, a call for the working class to unite its forces to fight for what the population needs.

Other workers in these four states can use the election to express themselves. In Maryland and Michigan, every voter can vote for a Working Class Party candidate.

With their vote, they can affirm that they want their class to build its own party.

Their vote can be a statement that other workers can hear, realizing that what they want, other workers want. So, the ground has been broken.

This may not seem like much. First steps often don't. But to get someplace else, you have to have the courage to take that first step.

—The Spark, September 28, 2026

<https://the-spark.net/paper/1259/needed-a-working-class-party-what-are-the-first-steps-to-build-one/>



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email: info@socialistviewpoint.org

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The Despotism of Capitalism and the Democracy of Socialism

BY BONNIE WEINSTEIN

Socialism is the arch enemy of capitalism because it challenges the very foundation of capital which is the private ownership of the means of production resulting in the vast accumulation of private wealth for the capitalist class and the impoverishment of everyone else.

Socialism also challenges capitalism's right to protect their private wealth and privilege by force.

Socialism is founded upon the principle of a world governed by the masses of humanity—peacefully, democratically, and in the interests of all of life on earth—and for the majority's democratic right to expropriate the massive private profits accumulated by the tiny few.

The lengths to which capitalism will go to protect power and wealth

In a September 15, 2026, *New York Times* article by Francesca Regalado, titled, "U.S. Has Deployed Weapons in Space, Air Force Secretary Says" the author reports:

"The United States has stationed weapons in Earth's orbit, Air Force Secretary Troy E. Meink said on Monday, the first such public acknowledgment by a Pentagon official after years of preparations to counter potential deployments by Russia and China. 'We are increasing readiness against existing threats, and the United States has on-orbit space control weapons capable of defending the Joint Force against hostile adversary action,' he said at a convention in Maryland, according to a news release published on the Air Force's website."

This fact should strike terror in the hearts of everyone. Weapons in space for the sole purpose of having control of all the wealth and resources across the globe is irrational and despotic. It exposes the fact that there is nothing democratic about capitalism—in the end, what they can't get by theft, persuasion or subterfuge, they will take by deadly force.

Shadow wars

Capitalists are competing in the world's capitalist marketplace for the resources needed to increase their rate of profits, and war and violence are their *modus operandi*.

An October 10, 2026, *Times* article titled, "A Deadly Firefight Exposes Erik Prince's New Shadow War in Congo" by Declan Walsh exposes U.S. involvement in Prince's shadow war to steal a U.S. stake in the natural resources of the Congo, as just one example.

Erik Prince is an American businessman, who is the founder of Blackwater, the private military contractor noted for massacres in the U.S. wars against Iraq and Afghanistan.

In his article the author explains how Prince goes about his business of helping to secure U.S. mining interests in the Congo using the same violent methods he used in Iraq and Afghanistan:

"Mr. Prince's growing influence in Congo comes as the Trump administration seeks a new toehold for American companies in the country's lucrative mining industry, where China's dominance over critical minerals like cobalt is a source of growing concern in Washington. Last December the United States and Congo signed an agreement granting preferential access to American mining interests in Congo, which many Congolese officials privately called a "peace for minerals" deal. ... Western mercenaries have long been a sensitive subject in Congo, where hundreds of European fighters joined an effort by the Katanga region to secede in the 1960s. Many Congolese also remember the C.I.A.'s role in the overthrow of their country's first prime minister, Patrice Lumumba¹, who was



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later executed by a firing squad led by Belgian contract officers.”

“Hunter-killer drones”

In addition to killing over 200 fishermen² in the U.S. boat strike campaign under the guise of fighting drug cartels in South America, Trump is sending “hunter-killer” drones not only to show the world the military superiority of the U.S., but to show that the American capitalist class will do all that it takes to secure their access to the natural resources of all of South America. It has nothing to do with eliminating the crisis of drug addiction that is killing millions.

In the October 6, 2026, *New York Times* article, titled, “U.S. Sends ‘Hunter-Killer’ Drones to South America to Target Cartels,” the authors, Annie Correal and Eric Schmitt report:

“MQ-9 Reaper drones—known for high-profile deadly strikes—have been shifted from Africa to Colombia and Ecuador, U.S. officials said. ... The drone is capable of carrying thermal cameras as well as equipment that can intercept electronic communications, and it has been called the U.S. military’s ‘hunter-killer.’ ... The Trump administration has made exerting greater influence in Latin America a priority, focusing especially on security. It has built a coalition of regional leaders that has pledged to help dismantle cartels; the group’s official slogan is ‘We do bad things to bad people.’ Washington has previously justified lethal strikes on drug traffickers by claiming that they are enemy combatants.”

There are no boundaries to capitalism’s greed

The epitome of this military aggression by the world’s capitalist class was outlined in an October 4, 2026, *New York Times* article by Selam Gebrekidan, titled, “Who Owns the Moon?”:

“In Robert Heinlein’s 1950 novella “The Man Who Sold the Moon,” a tycoon embarks on a quest to be the first human on the moon and proceeds to auction off title rights

to the lunar surface. ‘There is going to be one hell of a fight one of these days over who owns the moon,’ he tells his fellow businessmen. ‘I want the deck stacked so that we win.’

The author, Selam Gebrekidan, goes on to explain:

“In that era, as the United States and the Soviet Union raced to the moon, the future that Mr. Heinlein envisioned looked like it might come true. To head off this concern, the superpowers made an agreement, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967. The moon, more than 100 countries agreed, belonged to no one. ... The world’s superpowers are now racing to build nuclear-powered lunar bases, and corporate leaders have their own moon dreams. Elon Musk, a fan of Mr. Heinlein’s work, envisions ‘trillion-dollar markets’ including lunar data centers and a catapult for launching satellites deeper into space. Jeff Bezos wants to move heavy industry to the moon and leave Earth a ‘garden planet.’ The United States government is eyeing the helium, frozen water and other resources near the moon’s south pole.”

Meanwhile, the world’s working class is in a desperate financial crisis

In a September 7, 2026, *Times* article by Brent Neiman titled, “Why Labor’s Share of Wealth Is Shrinking”:

“Workers are earning a smaller and smaller share of the economy’s income. Their cut—referred to by economists as “the labor share”—has been falling for decades. And it’s getting worse. During the past few years, it declined at a rapid clip and is now at its lowest level on record—about 53 percent of income, down from about 65 percent after World War II. ... When the share of income paid to capital—interest, rent, profits and dividends—rises, the labor share necessarily falls.”

Socialism is the key to workers’ power

In an August 24, 2026, *Times* article by Kim Phillips-Fein titled, “Is This a New Era of Class Warfare?” about a disgruntled warehouse worker, Chamel Abdulkarim, who was charged with torching a Kimberly-Clark warehouse.



An ad that was approved by President Trump and paid for by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, funded by our tax dollars. via YouTube

Abdulkarim worked for a distribution company servicing the warehouse and was charged with arson that caused \$600 million worth of damages.

The article's author delivers a little history lesson comparing the conflict of wealth inequality between capital and labor since Carnegie's time. He explains that Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) was an industrialist, steel tycoon and major philanthropist who believed that:

“...the answer to class rage was for the rich to invest their money in philanthropic projects so that the poor would become convinced that they were benevolent at heart, able to steward the resources of society.”

The history lesson continues:

“American class relations continued to be fiercely violent after World War I, as companies and the government worked together to break the labor movement. Hundreds of immigrant radicals faced deportation following a series of bombings.... The class violence of the late 19th and early 20th centuries continued during the 1920s, in the mine wars of West Virginia, and the 1930s, when many corporations stockpiled gas equipment and guns to resist rebellion.

“Company security forces fired on unemployed workers at the Ford Motor Company in 1932 who were participating in a ‘hunger march.’

“Police officers killed strikers on the San Francisco waterfront in 1934, sparking a general strike.

“In Chicago three years later, police officers shot and killed ten pro-labor marchers in what came to be called the Memorial Day Massacre.

“Only days before, Ford security guards savagely beat up United Automobile Workers union leaders, including the union president, Walter Reuther, on camera—images that were carried in newspapers throughout the country.”

The article goes on to point out how economic inequality inevitably leads to social crisis:

“Societies in which there is an extreme division between the wealthiest and the rest tend to be politically unstable ones as well. ... Inequality makes it virtually impossible to sustain the feeling that we're all part of the same political project, and so it makes it hard for people to believe that democratic government is possible—that we all have a common stake in society. Small numbers of people with great fortunes come to exercise disproportionate political power. ... But what matters is how this class anger is expressed, whether it leads to nihilism or solidarity, to isolated rage or collective action. By so profoundly weakening many of the institutions that once nurtured collective action—labor unions, political organizations, protest groups—our society has made itself one in which people torch warehouses.

**When the share of
income paid to capital—
interest, rent, profits
and dividends—rises,
the labor share
necessarily falls.**

And while it doesn't call for socialism as an alternative to capitalism, it does hit the nail on the head of the problem:

“What we need is a more viable path to a better world, or at least a more equal one.”

Money

Money separates the haves from the have-nots, yet it's the have-nots that create the wealth through our labor power. Unless we are already born to wealth (a tiny minority of humanity) we are obligated to work in order to get any of the wealth we create because the “haves,” the capitalist class, own the product of our labor and the means of production to produce it.

Nothing comes to the working class for free. Even the air we breathe is not totally free. If we live near a refinery, we pay for the air we breathe with poor health—and then we have to pay for healthcare.

Us against them

Class society is one where there is a small minority class that protects its privilege of private ownership of the wealth produced by the masses through the threat of force and violence.

Class conflict has existed for millenium. And today, the gap between the haves and the have-nots is wider than it has ever been.

All capitalist conflicts around the world are really battles for private control of the resources of the world and for access to cheaper labor.

Capitalist philosophy is that those with the biggest guns, win the biggest bounty of both wealth and power over the masses that create that wealth.

But, in reality, they can only have the power that we, the masses, are tricked into giving to them.

The power of labor solidarity in action

Just how much we get paid for our labor is really up to us because we only get as much as we unite and fight for.

Together we are the overwhelming majority, and we have the power to take control over all the wealth we produce. And, in fact, if we had control over the bounty of our labor, we would have no need for money.

We have been hoodwinked into believing that those in power over us deserve their status because they are better than us—the cream of the crop. “Their money”—the money they have stolen from the wealth our labor produces—allows them all the luxuries imaginable.

They and their children not only get the best education, but they automatically have a share of the family wealth and the privilege and power it brings them.

You don't need any intelligence to inherit wealth, and power.

Humanity's worth

Capitalism's measure of the worth of the masses of human beings depends primarily on how much money we, as individuals, have been able to accumulate on our own, while born to a family with no property or wealth. (Capitalists have a different criteria of worth for themselves.)

To have power over us, they must make us believe that our neighbors are our enemy, that people different than us are our enemy. Most importantly, people poorer than us are our enemy.

Money is the most powerful tool capitalism uses to divide us. Yet they must divide us further on the basis of race, religion, sexual identity—pitting us against each other in every way possible—to keep us from identifying them, and the capitalist system they run by force and violence to maintain their wealth, as the central problem humanity and the world faces today.

World in turmoil

On Saturday, October 17, 2026, over 800,000 French students and workers united and took to the streets and brought France to a halt to protest dilapidated schools and drastic austerity measures especially targeting services to the poorest communities. The outrage across the country is growing, and more demonstrations have been scheduled in the coming weeks.

Workers everywhere are feeling the degradation of their living standards while the gap between the rich and the poor is wider than it has ever been.

We need more than demonstrations. We need organization. We need to build a movement independent of, and in opposition to, the capitalist class and the entire capitalist system. We need to build organizations designed to defend our democratic right to the wealth we create.

Ending capitalism and building socialism is the only way we can rationally plan an economy where everyone is able to contribute to the best of their ability, and share the product of our

cooperative labor equally—from each according to ability, to each according to need and want—a society based upon freedom, democracy, economic and social equality and justice for all—a socialist society that can satisfy the needs and wants of all, while preserving the only planet *and moon* we all share.

1 Patrice Émery Lumumba was a Congolese politician, independence leader, and revolutionary who served as the first prime minister of the First Congolese Republic (modern day Democratic Republic of the Congo) from June until September 1960, following his party's success in the May 1960 election. Lumumba was the leader of the Congolese National Movement (MNC) from 1958 until his assassination in 1961 aided by the C.I.A. Ideologically an African nationalist and pan-Africanist, he played a significant role in the transformation of the Congo from a colony of Belgium into an independent republic.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrice_Lumumba#:~:text=%5B%5D%20%5B%5D%20Lumumba%20was%20the,an%20African%20nationalist%20and%20pan%20

2 “The U.S. Boat Strike Campaign Has Now Killed Over 200 People”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/31/world/americas/us-boat-strikes-colombia-ecuador.html?searchResultPosition=2>

Spectacle of the Macabre In New York

BY NATE BEAR

September 25, 2026—What's unfolding in New York is a show of breathtaking degeneracy, a depraved spectacle exposing the illegitimate imperial order and the institutions on which it is built.

At the UN general assembly meeting, world leaders, included wanted war criminals, have been getting up on stage, one after the other, and bragging about genocide, war crimes and mass slaughter. Liberal leaders, complicit in the delinquency of empire despite their professed humanitarian credentials, have excused or downplayed those crimes, while others have celebrated facilitating them.

First there was Trump, who began by threatening an apocalypse on Iran, moved on to flaunting the illegal blockade of Cuba before triumphantly mocking Venezuela over the U.S. theft of its oil, declaring that “to the victor belong the spoils.” In a little over half-an-hour, during which he also demanded the International Criminal Court (ICC) be disbanded, Trump succinctly outlined why the U.S. is the largest terror organization the world has ever seen. It was a sickening display. But rather than stand against Trump's vision and version of a world ruled by a wanton lust for violence and control,

liberal leaders either made excuses for it or doubled down on his vision.

Mark Carney, when asked about Trump's language, shrugged it off, saying “well, there's a war underway, and he's speaking the language of war.” After normalizing threats to commit war crimes, he went on to label the country targeted for imperial annihilation as “one of the greatest threats in the current world and an existential threat to Israel and its allies.” Carney, the great liberal conscience and supposed redeemer of western values laid the rhetorical ground for Trump and Israel to commit further ultra-violence

and mass murder against Iranians. Carney, who mere months ago was being lauded for standing up to Trump, centered the rights and security of a state committing genocide, rather than the one being threatened with genocide. Carney is a monstrous individual.

Then there was Mark Rutte, former prime minister of The Netherlands and current head of NATO, who proudly stated that “it would have been impossible to do operation epic fury without having Europe as a power projection platform for the U.S.” He said that “five thousand planes have taken off from European bases in support of epic fury this year. Country after country made them available.” Yes, he used the words “power projection platform” without a hint of self-awareness, all while confirming a level of European involvement that Europe has tried to deny. A Europe which, in Rutte’s own words, exists merely as a “platform,” a vassal continent from which imperialism is propelled eastwards. The same Europe which has just handed over Greenland to Trump and the Americans to serve as an extension to this “platform.”

Then there was Netanyahu, the butcher of Gaza and wanted war crimi-

nal, who boasted proudly of the ultra-violence his terror state has overseen. Before he spoke the language of genocidal violence from the podium of an organization designed, ostensibly, to rid the world of such violence, he was provided with a huge police escort by the mayor of the city who previously

Trump is not an aberration. The genocide of Gaza is not an aberration. The attack on Iran is not an aberration. Mass death in the service of empire is not an aberration.

made arresting this criminal a central element of his election campaign. In July, to pre-empt accusations of betrayal, Mamdani said his team had examined the legalities, and he couldn’t command the NYPD to arrest Netanyahu. Perhaps not. But he could have commanded them to not arrest anti-genocide protestors yesterday. He

could have ordered them not to provide the wanted war criminal with a huge protective police motorcade through the city. He could at a minimum have joined the protests himself. Mamdani is a coward, a traitor to Palestine and Palestinians who, on genocide, has betrayed many of his voters. It gives me absolutely no pleasure to say that an article I wrote about Mamdani in January has been vindicated on more than one occasion during his mayoralty so far.

The only leaders speaking in condemnatory tones and attempting to shake the moral conscience of the world were the targets of imperial crimes, but they are treated by the western political and media establishment as savage enemies, their words and warnings ignored. Iran’s president Masoud Pezeshkian, for example, who summed up the absurdity of the imperial order well when he said that “the nuclear bombs are in Israel, but the inspectors are in Iran. Israel commits genocide, yet Iran is sanctioned.” Pezeshkian also delivered the most sensible, statesman-like and human message of the meeting so far, saying “we must not build a world in which military power replaces legitimacy, sanctions replace diplomacy, terror replaces politics, and war replaces dialogue.” His appeal was a stark contrast to the genocidal ravings of Trump and Netanyahu, yet you’ll struggle to find these words in any mainstream western reporting, complicit as they are in the war against Iran, western hegemony, and the slide into an ever-deeper dystopia.

As for the Palestinian victims of genocide and apartheid, well they had their visas revoked before they could even step on a plane. A disgraceful act by empire, but not a surprise, given that for eighty years the west has tried to deny Palestinians platforms from which they could demand justice and accountability. Or merely platforms from which they can tell their stories at all.

There have been numerous defining moments for western liberalism in the



United Nations Headquarters in New York City.

last few years, but this feels like a season closer. A brazen show of inhumanity, another nail in the coffin of international law and the mythical rules-based order. The good news is that a myth can't die. The only thing that can die is our conception of the world that the myth created. This world was, we now see, nothing more than a presentational fiction, a parody of order designed to coat the western conscience in a soothing balm. A facade designed to hide the true nature of our political realities. Nothing real existed, so nothing can be mourned. We should, however, be furious at those who constructed this *façade* of liberal humanitarianism as a cynical mechanism to forestall true progress and justice. And we should scorn those who still refuse to see through the bullshit and the lies, or who insist these developments are new and a gentle nudge can put us back on the right track.

The truth is clearer than ever.

Trump is not an aberration. The genocide of Gaza is not an aberration. The attack on Iran is not an aberration. Mass death in the service of empire is not an aberration.

This death flows, as it has since the dawn of colonialism, from the minds, values and ideologies of western elites. The firewall of liberal gentility that prevented such feral, inhumane values from being pronounced at the UN podium has fallen. Never have the vaunted institutions of liberalism, and liberal democracy itself, been so exposed.

And never has the need for revolutionary thinking, politics and formations that can help remake and replace these systems and institutions been more necessary.

—*Do Not Panic!*, September 25, 2026

https://www.donotpanic.news/p/a-spectacle-of-the-macabre-in-new?utm_source=post-email-

Imperialism and the Moral Decay of the West

By ATILIO BORON

September 8, 2026—The irreversible decline of the U.S. empire's global hegemony is not merely an economic or technological issue. Such a reductionist approach would prevent us from grasping the full scope and the many dimensions of this slow but inexorable decline.

It is also a military issue: the inability to win wars, continually highlighted by analysts in that country and confirmed in recent days by the setback suffered by Washington (and its cronies in Tel Aviv) in the war against Iran.

It is also political, because one of the consequences of the dictatorship of capital that underlies the logic of the empire has been the growing dissatisfaction with bourgeois democracy, the practice of which has only served to make the rich exponentially wealthier and keep the vast majority of the U.S. population in poverty: that is, without universal access to quality public healthcare and education, decent housing, and a wide range of labor and social rights.

This is one of the reasons why some sections of the American poor are increasingly inclined to seek and vote progressive or left-wing alternatives—alternatives that were denounced as “communist” by Donald Trump in his speech of the recent Fourth of July.

And it is also a moral issue because societies—not only the United States but Western societies in general—seem to have been numbed into feeling no compassion whatsoever for the victims of the brutality unleashed by the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and theft of foreign territories carried out by the

Israeli neo-fascist regime, with its indiscriminate attacks against defenseless civilian populations; or by the ruthless attacks that the United States and Israel launched against the Iranian population and the selective annihilation of Iran's religious and political leadership; or by the U.S. bombing of a defenseless Caracas and the subsequent abduction of Nicolás Maduro, president of the

**“...unilateral sanctions
are associated with an
annual death toll of
564,258 people.”**



U.S. President Donald Trump (C). X/ @MarioNawfal

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and his wife, Congresswoman Cilia Flores.

Outrageous acts, typical of monstrous characters like Adolf Hitler, which in their time drew near-universal condemnation today are “normalized” and accepted with indifference by the public—all thanks to the media scoundrels, the reign of algorithms, and the instruments of cognitive and volitional control that the ruling classes have at their disposal to subjugate the people and consolidate their supremacy.

Yet, the forms of genocide have evolved over time. The Nazi barbarism that led to the Holocaust of the Jews in Europe, or the ongoing massacre of the Palestinian people—especially women and children—coexist today with a more covert but no less criminal form of genocide: the policy of “sanctions” imposed by the United States and its unworthy European pawns against countless countries.

Recently, a lecture by University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer cited a study published in the prestigious British journal, *The Lancet*, which reported the findings of a research on the medical and social consequences of “unilateral coercive measures” imposed on 152 countries between 1971 and 2021.

The authors of the aforementioned study—Francisco Rodríguez, Silvio Rendón, and Mark Weisbrot—summarized their findings by stating that “unilateral sanctions are associated with an annual death toll of 564,258 people.”

In other words, some 28 million people died as a result of the economic “sanctions” imposed by Washington over the course of half-a-century—just over a third of the casualties caused by World War II!. Consequently, we are witnessing a slow, invisible, and relentless genocide that provokes condemnation from only a small fraction of the global public. That is why the Chicago scholar speaks of “mass murder” caused by these policies.

Among the many countries that have suffered from them are Venezuela—especially since 2015—and Cuba, continuously since 1960, when the Eisenhower administration began imposing the first sanctions against the Cuban Revolution.

The criminal intensification of the blockade decreed by Donald Trump and his Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, has taken things to an unprecedented extreme. In vain, the overwhelming majority of UN member states have been calling on the U.S. government for decades to end the blockade (which the empire’s spin doctors try to sugarcoat by referring to it as an “embargo” rather than a blockade.)

**...we find ourselves
facing a society that
has been numbed in its
ability to think critically
and react against the
true mass murder
caused by U.S. sanctions
policies against Cuba,
Venezuela, and
numerous countries
around the world**

The empire, whose brutality grows as its decline gains momentum, has ignored these demands and has continued to inflict “collective punishment” on the Cuban people, causing deaths and terrible suffering, especially among those in need of medical care.

This is in addition to the punishment imposed by the blockade regarding oil supplies for the daily lives of the entire population: extremely long power outages, obstacles to mobility, shortages of essential goods, and the paralysis of institutions, from schools and universities to public hospitals.

From a strictly medical standpoint, it is important to note that Cuba—which had been among the countries with the lowest infant mortality rates in the world—saw a 148 percent increase between 2018 and 2025, rising from 4.0 per 1,000 live births to 9.9, according to a study released by the Center for Economic and Policy Research based in Washington.

This surge means that approximately 1,800 Cuban children have died as a result of the blockade—a figure that pales in comparison when you add the deaths of patients who cannot access their cancer medications or drugs for the treatment of diabetes and many other chronic diseases.

In short, Washington’s policy is a war crime, and those responsible should be brought to trial, just as the regime’s leaders responsible for the genocide of the Jews were at the Nuremberg trials following the defeat of Nazism.

Today we have another one underway—in Gaza, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon—which, however, does not provoke the outrage and condemnation that arose at the mid-forties of the past century.

To make matters worse, we find ourselves facing a society that has been numbed in its ability to think critically and react against the true mass murder caused by U.S. sanctions policies against Cuba, Venezuela, and numerous countries around the world.

This tacit acceptance of the blockade is one of the great accomplishments of the imperial “soft power.” Hence the urgency of waging the “war of ideas,” as Martí put it, urging us to win it “through the power of thought.”

This means fighting with all our might against the dominant conventional wisdom and those who, like Pontius Pilate¹, wash their hands of this tragedy and turn a blind eye to it; also, against the apathetic and those who worship depoliticization and retreat into selfish interests.

In its decay, the empire has debased the societies of the collective West, fostering selfishness and rendering them insensitive to the suffering of their fellow human beings.

The words that a young Gramsci² used in his article titled “I Hate the Indifferent” are particularly relevant here. There he said, among other things, that “indifference is the dead weight of history. But indifference exerts a powerful influence on history. It operates passively, but it operates, nonetheless. It is fate; that which cannot be told.”

Or, we might add, that which can be told but is not told because the media landscape is dominated by the enemy, determined to cover up the crimes of the system. And Gramsci went on to say that “to live means to take sides.

Whoever truly lives cannot fail to be a citizen and a partisan. Indifference and apathy are parasitism; they are cowardice; they are not life. That is why I hate the indifferent.”

**that “God had reserved
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neutrality.”**

In that short article, Gramsci draws on the humanist legacy that Dante Alighieri imprinted in *The Divine Comedy* when he declared that “God had reserved the most horrendous cir-

cle of hell for those who, in times of moral crisis, had opted for neutrality.”

—teleSUR, September 8, 2026

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/imperialism-and-the-moral-decay-of-the->

1 Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, serving under Emperor Tiberius from 26/27 to 36/37 AD. He is best known for being the official who presided over the trial of Jesus and ultimately ordered his crucifixion.

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

2 Antonio Francesco Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher, journalist and politician. He was a founding member and one-time leader of the Italian Communist Party. A vocal critic of Benito Mussolini and fascism, he was imprisoned in 1926 and remained in prison until shortly before his death in 1937.

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

High School Student Revolt in France

By JUAN CHINGO

October 8, 2026—Six months before the presidential elections, just as the electoral calendar seemed to be emerging as the only way to resolve the French political crisis, the high school student revolt has brought social struggle back to the forefront. A generation of young people from the working-class high schools of the Parisian suburbs, expected to quietly pursue their studies and accept their fate in the capitalist system, have asserted their demands and established their own timeline for action.

The structural reasons for this explosion of struggle—“social selection” (according to which French schools sort students by their social status), anxiety about the future, and the decline of education—have combined with a particular conjuncture: the end of Macron’s presidency. After nearly ten years of successive attacks and crises, his already-eroded authority is once again being challenged.

While political forces were preparing their campaigns, the high school students burst onto the scene, explaining that their future could no longer wait. As Elisabeth Allain-Moreno, general secretary of the Teachers Union, National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (SE-UNSA), a major French teachers union, points out, “After ten years of Emmanuel Macron’s education policies, student anger was to be expected. One might even wonder why it wasn’t expressed sooner.”

**...students from
privileged schools in
Paris are mobilizing
against the inequalities
suffered by their peers
in working-class
neighborhoods**

In this context, the events of October 6, which mobilized more than 450,000 people nationwide, mark a significant step forward. They demonstrate that repression and media propaganda have neither broken the students’ resolve nor isolated their movement. On the contrary, high schoolers were joined in their mobilization that Tuesday by university students, parents, teachers, and union members, and the attempt to criminalize their struggle was thwarted as the mobilization broadened its demands and gained new support. According to an Ipsos poll, 62 percent of the population views the movement as justified.

This widening support includes a particularly progressive element: students from privileged schools in Paris are mobilizing against the inequalities suffered by their peers in working-class neighborhoods. “The same public school in Saint-Denis as in Paris,” chanted students at Henri-IV, for example. At the private Massillon high

school in Paris, students spoke of their “privileges” and protested with banners of solidarity for the Paul-Éluard high school in Saint-Denis. These actions challenge the competition between students and the divide between those who benefit from favorable study conditions and those who must fight to win them. In short, the revolt is beginning to build bridges where the education system erects barriers.

But this progress must be consolidated. University students, who have begun to mobilize in recent days, must strengthen their struggle: expand the blockades, organize large assemblies, and open universities to high school students to organize meetings and coordination in response to the many school closures. Their experience and spaces can become points of support for those who launched the revolt and who remain the most vulnerable to repression.

The involvement of workers must also deepen. Solidarity is fundamental, but it must translate into collective action in the workplace and strike action to build a united front against government repression and attacks. In this

sense, while several organizations supported the day of action on October 6, the fact that the interunion group set the date for the next interprofessional mobilization for November 5 the day before demonstrates a desire to bypass the high school student movement and the October 17 protests. Therefore, all union members who see the urgent need to remain in solidarity with high school students must contact their unions. As calls for mobilization multiply for October 17, workers must demand a plan to unify the anger and allow it to continue despite the school holidays.

In short, the revolt is beginning to build bridges where the education system erects barriers.

On the government side, French prime minister Sébastien Lecornu is trying to regain the initiative by combining a defense of the police response

with vague promises. On Tuesday, he announced the gradual reopening of high schools and the organization of a half-day of discussions, with the aim of ending the blockades and street protests and shifting discussions to the classrooms within the framework of institutional procedures overseen by the principals. The government acknowledges the problems but seeks to address them using its own methods, imposing its own pace and buying time to demobilize the students.

There is no guarantee that it will succeed. While many groups of high school students intend to continue the blockades, students and teachers could take advantage of the reopening to self-organize, debate their demands, elect representatives, and connect schools with one another. The establishment of such assemblies and coordinating bodies is crucial to enabling high school students to pursue their struggle and control all negotiations. University students have a crucial role to play in this task: putting their skills and mobilization capacity at the service of a common movement.

October 6 widened the breach opened by the youth of working-class neighborhoods. The movement must now achieve continuity and organization: assemblies, mandated delegates, coordination between high schools and universities, and workers’ strikes that embody the feeling of solidarity. The meeting convened by Macron with some of his ministers this Tuesday evening demonstrates the government’s anxiety in the face of a revolt it cannot contain. This moment must be seized to go on the offensive: uniting the strength of youth with that of workers, broadening the mobilization, and building the social confrontation capable of defeating the government and its attacks.

—Left Voice, October 8, 2026

<https://www.leftvoice.org/in-france-the-high-school-student-revolt-gains-ground-and-shakes-the-end-of-macrons-reign/>



High school and university students, alongside various sector unions in France protest against the decline in education, oppressive economic policies, and police brutality.

France's Youth Ignite Massive Revolt

BY DIANE DE VIGNEMONT

Paris, October 21, 2026—"Make sure you tell the Americans that trash cans aren't the only things burning in France," 16-year-old Ewen told *Truthdig* as protesters gathered on the Place de la République on Saturday. Tear gas canisters had been falling into the growing crowd for about an hour, and the teen struggled to make himself heard with his mask.

"Our future is burning, too," Ewen added. Due to the repression and arrests by police, most protesters asked that only their first names be used.

In rapid succession, he listed everything he'd come to protest against: his rat-infested high school, the violent police repression of the student movement, but also the lack of hospital beds across the country, the cost of living, the saturated job market and the quickly-forgotten fires that ravaged France this summer. During the country's hottest summer on record this year, some 250,000 acres of forest burned.

Grabbing his three friends, Ewen then posed for a photo, holding up a sign that read: "If we burn, you burn with us!"

"It's a 'Hunger Games'¹ reference," Ewen explained, as though I were decidedly too ancient to get it on my own. "It means that we're not just fighting for ourselves, but for you, too."

Marine Champetier de Ribes, who teaches literature at a school in a Paris suburb, told *Truthdig* that she felt France's youth had awakened something in the rest of society. "Us adults had collectively fallen into torpor," she said. "They shook us out of it and reminded us all that we're right to be angry."

On October 17, that torpor lifted in plain sight. Between 550,000 and 800,000 people marched across the country. Though much of the national and inter-

national coverage focused on the violence that marred the margins of Saturday's protests, the lesson was elsewhere: In less than a month, the high schoolers' movement managed to pull a tired, resigned country back into the streets. Students were joined by teachers, parents, doctors, nurses, lawyers, pensioners, Yellow Vests, farmers and firefighters in perhaps the most intersectional movement France has seen in decades.

"Too young to be listened to, big enough to get beaten up."

"They write the rules, and we follow"

Champetier de Ribes, 34, told *Truthdig* that she and her colleagues across the education sector had been organizing for years, but had been slowly losing steam. "No one was listening to us," she lamented.

In her school alone, she cited "cockroach-infested walls, clogged toilets,

rat droppings in the microwaves and boiling classrooms that have yet to cool down after this summer's heat waves." Champetier de Ribes said she has also been forced to fit 38 students into her 215-square-foot classroom, which never has enough chairs and desks: "I've had to insist that at least three of them be absent every week so I can teach the rest," she said.

Champetier de Ribes said teachers had become disillusioned. "We'd quite forgotten how to be angry, until, that is, our students began leading by example," she said.

Starting on September 17, high schoolers across the country began barricading their schools to demand better material conditions and equal education opportunities. The movement began in the Paris suburb of Créteil and it spread fast: By October 1, the Interior Ministry reported that more than 1,000 of France's 3,700 high schools had been affected, over 200 of them blockaded.



Students march to protest against under-resourced schools in Rennes, France, on Oct. 13, 2026. (Graphic by Truthdig; images by AP Photo, Adobe Stock)

The students' demands are more specific than their critics let on: a ten-billion-euro investment plan for schools, and an end to Parcoursup, the national platform that manages university admissions, which is often compared to a "social sorting machine" and criticized for its lack of transparency.

They're also asking for more teachers. Last year, students across France lost some 20 million hours-worth of lessons because absent teachers were not replaced. The education shortfalls are a result of President Emmanuel Macron's neoliberal approach to public education funding while simultaneously increasing defense spending.

Teachers, in turn, organized to support their pupils. "They write the rules and we follow," Champetier de Ribes said. She and her colleagues created an Instagram account to share the students' demands with a grown-up audience: "We have to speak their language," she added with a laugh.

From the start, the movement was met with force. The government, which chose to label the movement not as a "school protest" but as "urban violence," sent police riot squads directly into high schools and universities.

Eden, 14, had his jaw fractured and most of his teeth knocked out after being struck in the face by a tear gas grenade in a Paris suburb, leaving him, according to his mother, barely able to eat through a straw in his hospital bed. A 15-year-old in the north had his hand torn off by a so-called anti-encirclement grenade. On Saturday, in the eastern town of Mulhouse, Maïssa, 17, was struck by a tear-gas canister and lost her left eye.

Some 6,773 minors have been taken into police custody since the protests began in mid-September. Complaints are currently being filed across the country for verbal and physical mistreatment of these high schoolers during their detention.

This level of violence gave teachers yet another cause for concern, Champetier de Ribes said. "We were, to put it plainly, terrified at the very idea of seeing our students face off with the police." Five months pregnant, she herself cannot physically protect her students, as tear gas is highly toxic. But she did help her colleagues prepare emergency kits. Identified with a white armband, these teachers carry masks, saline solution, bandages, disinfectant, water and applesauce pouches, ready to assist their pupils should they need help.

"This generation shook us awake," Champetier de Ribes said. "Now, we have to be there for them, and alongside them."

"Firefighters and healthcare workers stand in solidarity."

Christophe, who teaches mathematics in a private Paris high school, joined the protest Saturday with a sign that read: "You should not have betrayed us. We're here to take our future back." He told *Truthdig* that, while his was not an underprivileged school, his students had nonetheless joined their peers on the street, demanding equality. "My students may not be the ones getting beat up, but they're still children," he said.

Down the street, as tear gas dispersed the musicians of the New World Orchestra, another sign read: "Too young to be listened to, big enough to get beaten up."

A convergence of anger

"I initially thought the movement seemed a bit harebrained," 50-year-old Rachid told *Truthdig* at Saturday's protest. The family doctor, who asked that his last name be withheld, had been perplexed by the high schoolers' scattered demands and confused by the odd costumes and the "aura battles"

they performed on the barricades in front of their schools.

"I thought this was another one of these social media trends I simply no longer understand," he quipped.

But after his daughter's classmates were heavily tear-gassed by the police, and still came back the next day, he began seeing things differently. "These kids, I realized, have a good head on their shoulders," Rachid said. He joined the movement on October 6, alongside his daughter.

He is not alone in that. Champetier de Ribes has noticed a similar shift. "There's a realization, even among people who initially disapproved of the movement. They saw the level of violence, saw how far the government was prepared to go to repress this movement, and decided to put themselves on the line, too," she said.

Rachid attended Saturday's protest in his white coat, emblazoned with the words, "Firefighters and healthcare workers stand in solidarity."

This was not Rachid's first protest. As the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the healthcare sector, he marched alongside thousands of colleagues—those the entire country had applauded night after night—in 2020. They asked for more beds, more ventilators, more money and better training. "But no matter how hard we tried, our movement remained confined to the healthcare sector," he said.

For years, each grievance has produced its own constituency, its own demonstration, its own cycle of exhaustion. French hospital workers marched for funding, teachers protested cuts and education reforms, retirees took to the street to protect their pensions, farmers blocked roads to protest rising costs of production, Yellow Vests swarmed the Champs Élysées to demand lower gas prices. Time and time again, crowds gathered, the political class attempted to respond, and the country moved on.

The oft-aspired to “*convergence des luttes*” (convergence of struggles) never materialized. Until, that is, students disrupted that routine.

“This,” Rachid said as a young kilt-clad protester dressed the bronze statue of Marianne, personifying the French Republic, in a yellow vest, “is a different kind of beast entirely.”

The students’ insistence that their own futures are at stake has helped make connections between movements visible. In the presence of teenagers who refuse to accept that their future must be worse than their parents’ present, older demonstrators have found it harder to justify their own resignation.

“What we have here is a convergence not of struggles, but of anger,” Rachid said.

“Solidarité”

“We are very angry,” 18-year-old Juliette G. told *Truthdig*. A first-year student in political science at Sciences Po Paris, she deplored the “small-mindedness” of her elders, who balked at the intersectionality of the students’ demands.

“This is a student movement,” she said. “It’s also a feminist one, an anti-racist one, an ecologist one.” The variety of the students’ demands does not make them weaker, but stronger, she said. “Just because we’re doing things differently does not mean we are wrong.”

Her demands for intersectionality were echoed by Julie, a 27-year-old

engineer *Truthdig* met on Saturday. “I’m glad we’ve not left them to protest alone,” she said as a group of youth set a car on fire at the far corner of the square. But said she was concerned that their wide-ranging demands for a better future would get lost if “adults” began framing the movement in terms not of justice, but of violence.

“The youth are sick of being old-splained,” her sign read.

“This is a student movement,” she said. “It’s also a feminist one, an anti-racist one, an ecologist one.”

Behind her, *Truthdig* met two Latin American immigrants who had come to march in defense of democracy. Damien, 56, from Chile, carried a sign likening Macron’s repression of the youth movement to Augusto Pinochet’s in the 1970s in his country. “We’ve lived through this before,” he said. Carmen, 58, from Brazil, carried a heart-covered sign that read: “Let our children protest.”

“We’re here for Lula, too,” Carmen told *Truthdig*, referring to Brazil’s left-leaning President Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva, who is currently running against a Donald Trump-backed, far-right candidate.

Damien voiced his opposition to Chile’s José Antonio Kast and Argentina’s Javier Milei. “I may not be French, but I raised my daughter here, and I know your republic’s motto: ‘*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*.’ We have to show the world that we stand with these kids,” Carmen said.

“Sorry for the inconvenience”

Down the street, Lucie, 15, who attends a private Paris high school, held up a sign that read: “Sorry for the inconvenience, we’re trying to save our future.”

Champetier de Ribes told *Truthdig* she was “gobsmacked” to see privileged youth join the movement *en masse*. “The *macronie* [Macron’s political caste] is built on division and has been getting away with taking from some because they give to others,” she said. But this “doesn’t seem to work on young people—they’re not duped by efforts to divide them. They are fully aware that it’s absolute bullshit.”

“I’m incredibly proud of my students,” she said.

—*Truthdig*, October 21, 2026

<https://www.truthdig.com/articles/if-we-burn-you-burn-with-us-frances-youth-ignite-a-massive-revolt/>

¹ Directed by Francis Lawrence and released on November 22, 2013, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* is a dystopian sci-fi action film starring Jennifer Lawrence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunger_Games:_Catching_Fire

Continued from page 35

accused of genocide take the microphone, right after we watched a nuclear-armed president openly float the annihilation of a country of ninety million. The two founding nightmares of the institution, delivered as keynote addresses, back-to-back, to polite applause. And everyone just went along with it. Filed their stories. Attended the receptions. Talked about “tone” and “walk-outs.”

How? How is this thing still standing? How has no serious government stood up and said the obvious, which is that an institution that hosts the exact horrors it was built to prevent has no reason to exist anymore? Disband it. Salt the ground. Put something honest in its place or put nothing at all. Because whatever this is, it is not protecting us.

—*BettBeat’s Newsletter*, September 26, 2026

https://bettbeat.substack.com/p/a-podium-for-genocide-and-the-atom?utm_source=post-email-

In Defense of Abolition

BY TEMPEST NATIONAL COMMITTEE

September 24, 2026—A statement in response to the growing anti-abolition and anti-woke political discourse being co-opted by progressive democrats and writers on the Left ahead of this year's midterm elections.

"Years ago, I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free". —Eugene V. Debs

Six years ago, the racist police murder of George Floyd sparked the biggest uprising in the history of the United States. Across the country, over 26 million people poured into the streets for months in a mass multiracial movement against the police and jails that enforce U.S. capitalism's class and social inequalities.

Calls to defund and abolish the police emerged as organic demands of the movement. The burning down of a Minneapolis police precinct proved more popular than both presidential candidates. Faced with a profound crisis of legitimacy, the two capitalist parties each in their own way launched a counteroffensive to shore up and expand the police state at the core of our bourgeois democracy.

Tragically, some on the Left have adapted to the backlash. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently ridiculed the movement and its demands, quipping "woke 1.0 was crazyyyyy," while *Jacobin* writers such as Paul Heideman, Eric Blanc, Ben Burgis, and Dustin Guastella have come out against defund and abolition in the name of what they describe as "mass politics."

Their position is not only profoundly mistaken, but dangerous. Their echoing of ruling-class attacks on abo-

litionism and support for the police surrenders the ideological ground won by the 2020 rebellion, undermines the struggle against President Trump's authoritarianism, and impedes the fight for socialism.

Under Trump and Biden, national police expenditure increased by forty percent.

Ruling class backlash

Their arguments must be understood in the context of the bipartisan backlash against Black Lives Matter. Each party has played its traditional role. In 2020, President Trump and his Republican Party assassinated the character of George Floyd, demonized BLM activists as terrorists, defended the police, rallied support for racist counterdemonstrations, turned vigi-

lante Kyle Rittenhouse¹ into a right-wing hero, and even threatened to deploy troops to repress protests.

The Democrats, of course, pretended to be the movement's ally, with lifetime supporters of policing like Nancy Pelosi donning kente cloth² and bending her knee in the Capitol building. Mayors painted Black Lives Matter on city streets and enacted corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) measures. They did so to co-opt the struggle and turn Black Lives Matter into Black Votes Matter for Joe Biden. The ruling class demobilized the movement, opening the door for both parties to increase funding for cops, ICE, CBP (U.S. Customs and Border Protection), and the FBI.

From compassionate policing to authoritarianism

Once in power, President Biden vowed to "fund, fund, fund the police." He escalated the bipartisan war on migrants—shutting down the border,



An anti-police brutality protest in Brooklyn, New York, on June 2, 2026.

continuing the construction of Trump's border wall, and ramping up deportations. Biden and Democratic governors and mayors proposed and, in many cases, passed bills named after George Floyd. These dramatically increased funding for policing and prisons under cover of fake reforms like community policing, body cameras, and professional training. Under Trump and Biden, national police expenditure increased by forty percent.

The Democrats thereby re-legitimized and enacted the right's law-and-order agenda. This has led to an increase in police murders every year since 2020 and paved the way for the return of the racist-in-chief Donald Trump and his white supremacist Republican Party. Despite the national drop in crime, Trump seized the opening provided by the Democrats, whipping up a racist moral panic over false claims about lawlessness, lies about Black criminality, nonsensical allegations of "reverse racism" against DEI, and a xenophobic assault on immigrants.

Trump has funded, expanded, and weaponized the police state to an unprecedented degree. His "Big Beautiful Bill" poured \$75 billion into the coffers of ICE to abduct immigrants and throw them into concentration camps. He deployed the National Guard to patrol Washington, D.C. in search of nonexistent criminals, reducing them to weeding the city's unkempt gardens.

He deployed his ICE Gestapo in city after city as an occupying army, resulting in the murders of Renee Good, Alex Pretti, Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, Johan Sebastian Duran Guerrero, Silverio Villegas González, and Isaias Sanchez Barboza, to name only a few. Many more have died in ICE concentration camps. When the killing of Good and Pretti triggered a city-wide uprising and a national day of protest, Trump unleashed his beefed-up surveillance state to snoop on activists in the name of controlling left-wing terrorism.

His McCarthyite campaign led to charges against the Minneapolis 15 and the conviction of the Prairieland 9. Now, with his popularity plummeting and his party certain to lose the midterms, Trump has taken aim at democracy itself in an attempt to rig the elections. He has gerrymandered districts, his Supreme Court has gutted the Voting Rights Act, and some like Steve Bannon are calling for ICE to be deployed at the polls to deter Black and Brown voters.

These reversals derive from their strategy of prioritizing electoral campaigns within a capitalist party over mass struggle. They wager that by abandoning their previous positions they can win elected office and advance socialist demands. In fact, they are capitulating to a capitalist party well-versed in co-opting and neutralizing the Left.

Democratic Party backlash and left accommodation

The Democratic Party's "resistance" to Trump's ethnonationalist authoritarianism has been weak, counter-productive, and barely worthy of the name. This explains why the party's approval rating remains essentially tied with that of the Republican Party at 40 percent.

At best, the Democrats have demanded fake reforms to ICE, like body cameras and more training, which Trump happily enacted to legiti-

mate his escalating war on migrants. Internally, the Democratic Party pressured its candidates to disavow any radical *critiques* of the police. Rather than stand up against this calumny, reformist politicians have disowned their previous positions.

Their position is not only profoundly mistaken, but dangerous. Their echoing of ruling-class attacks on abolitionism and support for the police surrenders the ideological ground won by the 2020 rebellion, undermines the struggle against President Trump's authoritarianism, and impedes the fight for socialism.

Zohran Mamdani apologized for calling the police racist during his campaign for mayor of New York City. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) dismissed the movement and the radicalization it produced as collective insanity. Mamdani defended her, saying people can change their positions, while he himself praised Jessica Tisch, his police commissioner, the law-and-order heir to a billionaire family, for lowering New York City's crime rate.

These reversals derive from their strategy of prioritizing electoral campaigns within a capitalist party over mass struggle. They wager that by abandoning their previous positions they can win elected office and advance socialist demands. In fact, they are capitulating to a capitalist party well-versed in co-opting and neutralizing the Left.

Reformist intellectuals against Black Lives Matter

Several self-avowed Marxists have supported AOC and Mamdani's abandonment of abolitionism. Eric Blanc dismisses Black Lives Matter's call for defunding the police and refunding systems of care as ultra-left and an impediment to their idea of "mass politics." There are two key problems with this argument.

First, as decades of Gallup polling have documented, the demand to shift

funding from cops to care is actually popular. As some have pointed out, *Jacobin's* own polling data demonstrates that defund is more popular among working-class people than spending on mass transit. And second, even if defund wasn't popular, raising the demand is both morally and strategically right.

Remember, every major reform we've won from the abolition of slavery to suffrage, union recognition, civil rights, an end to the war in Vietnam, abortion rights, and gay marriage were initially unpopular. But a determined minority fought for them, won majority support, and used our collective power to protest and strike to force our rulers to concede them. But Blanc rejects that approach and instead argues for a strategy of reformism in the vain hope of using the capitalist state to enact socialism through legislation.

As a result, he argues that politicians must downplay supposedly unpopular demands of oppressed people like defund in order to win "working class votes." This class reductionism will backfire. It will shatter working-class unity by selling out oppressed people, lead reformist politicians to adapt to capitalist positions like law and order, lower rather than raise class consciousness and combativity, and thereby set back the very class and social struggles necessary to win reforms on the road to socialist revolution.

That said, the debate about abolitionism is deeper than demands and strategy; it is about the goal. Paul Heideman makes that abundantly clear when he argues against defund and abolition, advocates that socialists adopt "carceral minimalism," and cites as justification an article by Adaner Usmani and Chris Lewis that calls for hiring 500,000 more cops to control crime.

These reformists believe, despite the mountain of evidence to the contrary, that the state and its police force can be wielded for social good in the present and to achieve socialism in the future.

Advocating this position in the midst of the biggest expansion of authoritarian policing in U.S. history and its weaponization against unions, social movements, and the Left is bizarre, counterfactual, and unconscionable. They are empowering the ruling class to bolster a police state it will use to repress us all.

Faced with Trump's deployment of the government police state, we should be demanding massive cuts to police, ICE, CBP, and the military, and redistribution of that money to social programs that provide homes, jobs, education, and healthcare.

Marxism is abolitionism

All these arguments are at odds with Marx and socialism from below, which is abolitionist to its core. Marx advocated the overthrow of the capitalist state, the establishment of workers' democracy, and "the withering away of the state" itself. As Lenin argued, the socialist's "ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression" to "produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation" to advance the cause of socialism.

Thus, Marxism is abolitionist. The goal of social revolution and abolition shapes our immediate practice. Faced with Trump's deployment of the government police state, we should be demanding massive cuts to police, ICE, CBP, and the military, and redistribution of that money to social programs that provide homes, jobs, education, and healthcare.

In these struggles, socialists must reject the argument that police solve social harm. They don't and never will. As the enforcers of class and social inequality, they are one of the main causes of social harm, as their skyrocketing record of brutality and murder demonstrates. Instead, we must combat the carceral state and all its ruling-class violence, racism, and dehumanization.

We should therefore reaffirm our dedication to Marx's abolitionist call at the end of the *Communist Manifesto*. "The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

—CounterPunch, September 24, 2026

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/09/24/in-defense-of-abolition/>

1 Kyle Rittenhouse, 17 years old, killed two of three men he shot, amid protests and riots in Kenosha, Wisconsin in response to the police shooting of Jacob Blake in 2020.

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

2 Kente cloth is a bright, hand-woven fabric made of silk and cotton that originates from the Ashanti and Ewe people of Ghana in West Africa.

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

In Memoriam: Ward Churchill, 1947-2026

By ERIC CHEYFITZ

August 17, 2026—I write in remembrance of Ward Churchill, who died on August 11, 2026. I was a member of Ward’s defense team, headed by the civil rights attorney David Lane, both at hearings at the University of Colorado at Boulder (UCB) in 2007 and in state court in Denver in 2009, when he sued the university for his firing for charges of “research misconduct” and “plagiarism,” both of which I analyzed thoroughly in a 2008-09 edition of the journal “Works & Days.” The title of my essay is “Framing Ward Churchill: The Political Construction of Research Misconduct.” The title points to the political motivations of the charges against Ward. Those charges were manufactured to mask the attack on Ward from the Right (*Fox News*, the Colorado governor and legislature, and the UCB administration with the complicity of certain faculty committees) for his activism and speech on behalf of social justice, par-

ticularly focused on an essay he published a day after 9/11, titled “Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens,” on which I will focus in Part II of this essay. Indeed, the Denver jury, to which I gave expert testimony as a scholar of American Indian Studies and federal Indian law, found that Ward’s “protected speech [was] a substantial or motivating factor in the decision to discharge [him]” and that the University had not “shown by a preponderance of the evidence that [Churchill] would have been dismissed for other reasons.” Nevertheless, on July 7, 2009, District Court Judge Larry Naves “denied Churchill’s motion for employment reinstatement as a tenured professor and concluded that back pay ‘is not an appropriate remedy in this case’” (*CU Connections*). The Colorado Court of Appeals and Supreme Court upheld the Naves verdict, which served the university’s agenda against Ward.

Ward was and through his writing still is a generative figure in Native studies with his focus on colonialism and imperialism as it played and plays out in the Americas. His wide-ranging influence was represented by the strong Native and non-Native support he received in his fight with UCB from both his students and certain colleagues, and national scholars such as Michael Yellow Bird, then of the University of Kansas, who also acted as an expert witness. Ward’s support was national and international. I did not know Ward before I joined his defense team, but I necessarily knew his work, which had a significant influence on my own work in comparative settler colonialism as it did on the work of so many others; and it was my high regard for his work that led me to accept the invitation to join his defense team.

At this moment, with the genocide continuing in Gaza and spreading to the West Bank and Lebanon, I think particularly of Ward’s 1997 classic *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present*, of which David Stannard, who testified in the Denver trial on behalf of Ward and is himself the author of the 1992 classic *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*, wrote in the Preface: “So it is a good thing that Ward Churchill, with this book, *A Little Matter of Genocide*, had decided once again to go looking for trouble. He will get plenty of it. But it is only because of trouble-makers like him that the deadened conscience of this nation might someday begin to stir. May his kind multiply.” I am reminded here of civil rights activist and Congressman John Lewis urging us all to “find a way to get in the way” and get into “good trouble, necessary trouble.” We need this kind of trouble more than ever as the United States continues to



Churchill testifying on his own behalf in the civil trial of Ward Churchill v. University of Colorado – Public Domain

support Indigenous genocide both at home and in Palestine.

What follows in Part II of this essay is an excerpt from my essay, referenced above, “The Framing of Ward Churchill.” The excerpt looks into Ward’s essay “Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens” that got him into the “good trouble” that led to the Denver trial. We should remember that Ward’s case was centrally about academic freedom, which has been increasingly under fire since Ward exercised it and defended it, paying the price of his job for his activism, a price that so many faculty are paying today or are under threat of paying for their defense of Palestinian rights. In his obituary in the *New York Times*, Ward, speaking at UCB in 2017 is quoted as saying, “Academic freedom in America is dead....I had my identity before I was a professor. I had it while I was a professor, and I have it now.” If academics in America are to resurrect academic freedom, we must follow the example of Ward Churchill and give up the identity of professor, which is becoming more and more constricting, for the identity of activists for social justice in word and deed.

With a few small edits, the following section from my 2008-2009 essay “The Framing of Ward Churchill” is an example of Ward’s activism, of his courage and critical insight:

II

Issues that bear on the Churchill case began receiving national attention in late January and early February 2005. This attention focused on an essay Churchill published on the Internet between September 12 and October 7, 2001, when the United States invaded Afghanistan, titled, “‘Some People Push Back’: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens.” The essay served as a polemical analysis of what Churchill terms the “counterattacks” on the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon on 9/11 by

Arab militants. (Of this constituency it was later disclosed that 15 of the 19 operatives were from the U.S. ally Saudi Arabia.) Churchill argues that the attacks were a response to the West’s violent history in the Middle East, beginning with the Crusades and continuing in the present moment with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian homelands. But the focus of Churchill’s polemic is the 1991 U.S. bombing of Iraq’s water and sewage facilities—“‘aerial warfare’ constitut[ing] a Class I Crime Against humanity, entailing myriad gross violations of international law”—and the subsequent ten-year U.S. embargo of Iraq following the first Gulf War, which resulted in the deaths of an estimated 500,000 Iraqi children from the interdiction of food and medicine, deaths that former U.N. Assistant Secretary-General, Denis Halliday, termed a “genocide.”

“Deadly policy can happen and continue to happen in a democracy precisely because democracy itself can become the alibi for atrocities.”

What public commentary seized on as particularly egregious in Churchill’s essay, and what was duly noted in the UCB chancellor’s review, is his comparison of the “technocratic corps” of business operatives in the WTC, all serving “America’s global financial empire,” to “little Eichmanns.” Concomitantly in this essay, Churchill casts Americans in their passive acceptance of the Iraqi genocide in the role of “good Germans.” The Eichmann comparison undoubtedly offended because at a moment of national and private grief, it took the other side—an outrageous possibility for the media commentators, the

Colorado governor, the state legislature, and the university administration—where critical scrutiny turns the innocent into the guilty, the dead and the grieving into the perpetrators of violence. At a time that demanded sympathy for “us,” it displaced that sympathy with a plea for us to understand “them.”

I remember thinking at the time how inapt and inept the comparison to Eichmann was as a strict historical comparison—the demonizing force of the figure tends to erase history by collapsing crucial differences rather than articulating them. From a strictly historical standpoint, my take on the comparison hasn’t changed. But five years into the U.S. preemptive attack on Iraq—with its Orwellian justification of the invasion as the center of the so-called “war on terror;” the hundreds-of-thousands of Iraqi civilians dead and an estimated five million-plus displaced, 2.7 million internally and 2.4 million externally; with the U.S. use of torture, extraordinary renditions, the building and maintenance of the detention center at Guantánamo Bay (*et al.*); the abrogation of civil liberties in crucial areas through the PATRIOT and related Acts; the extensive use of surveillance on U.S. citizens; and the massive waste of human and material resources in order to maintain a “culture of death”—Congress can be seen as essentially condoning such actions and thus making itself complicit in war crimes. With these considerations at hand, I do not think that one can simply dismiss Churchill’s comparison as farfetched, though the comparison begs for such dismissal. Even if it does not work literally, the comparison does gesture toward another America that shadows “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” in which many of us think we live. To its credit, Churchill’s scholarship and criticism has consistently demanded that we acknowledge living in this other America. And this has angered those people who have a stake in the narrative of American exceptionalism.

In an op-ed piece I wrote for *Indian Country Today* on June 9, 2004, at the time when Abu Ghraib first entered U.S. headlines, I noted: “Deadly policy can happen and continue to happen in a democracy precisely because democracy itself can become the alibi for atrocities.” The Indian Removal Act of 1830 passed the House of Representatives by only five votes (102-97) and then only after President Jackson “pressured and bullied” House Democrats into breaking a tie over legislation that “would [have] delay[ed] consideration of removal for a year” (Jill Norgren). Thus, what would materialize as the ethnic cleansing and forced death marches of the Trail of Tears was democratically enacted. But we might ask, what does it mean for a society to be voting on such a measure in the first place? What does it mean to hold a vote on genocide? Writing against slavery, the Mexican War, and populist democracy, Henry David Thoreau in “Resistance to Civil Government” (1849) remarks on the limits of the vote as a tool of democratic social action:

“All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies it. The character of the voters is not staked. I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right; but I am not vitally concerned that that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority.”

I think this passage inhabits the same space as Churchill’s 9/11 essay, of his “good Germans” comparison, though it does so with much more precision; and so, we, whatever our criticisms of Churchill, might recognize that his essay, however expressed,

belongs to a vital American heritage of dissent and carries a message about which we ought to think.

We now know that no Iraqis as individuals nor Iraq as a state were involved in 9/11. But as Churchill acknowledges in an “Addendum” to his essay, he was not writing in a strictly literal mode (nor apparently was George W. Bush acting in one, though he thought he was, when he linked Saddam Hussein to 9/11); it was “more a stream-of-consciousness interpretive reaction to the September 11 counterattack than a finished piece on the topic” (in an eerie kind of way Churchill’s words here could characterize Bush’s war plan, which, however, had and continues to have literally devastating results.) That is, the genocide committed on Iraqi civilians by the U.S. bombing and embargo of Iraq prior to 9/11 is, for Churchill, symbolic of the many genocides committed by the United States throughout its history, beginning with the genocide against American Indians. However controversial or debated this position of deliberate genocide against American Indians is within American history and American Indian studies, Churchill is far from being alone in holding it, both in his writing and teaching (for which he won a student award at Colorado.) I hold this position myself. More importantly, the position that American Indians have been (and in specific ways still are) the victims of genocide, is a position widely held throughout Indian country.

III

Since I wrote the essay in 2009, when Churchill’s charge of Native American genocide was still being contested by a vocal but loud minority of American studies and American Indian studies scholars, as his hearing and trial attests (I doubt such scholars can be found today, if they are around, they are certainly in hiding, although Trump and friends would like them to come out.) But it is true, and this is a central point

of *A Little Matter of Genocide*, that the U.S. government and the U.S. educational system by and large have erased the genocide. To this point, and as a companion to Ward’s work, I suggest Lakota poet Layli Long Soldier’s long poem *Whereas* (2017) for anyone who wants to read the force of this erasure in the U.S. government’s bad-faith 2009 Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans. Satirizing all the “whereas” clauses that compose the Apology, Long Soldier at one point in the poem comments on a conversation with a “scholarly” “circle:” “Whereas I could’ve but I didn’t broach the subject of ‘genocide’ the absence of this term from the Apology and its rephrasing as ‘conflict’ for example.” Ward Churchill’s generative work remains an ongoing exposure of this absence in the history of the United States. May his work continue to trouble us and urge us to get into trouble, to get in the way, as he did throughout his career.

—CounterPunch, August 17, 2026

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/08/17/in-memorial-ward-churchill-1947-2026/>

The Counter-Revolution of Capital

BY NICK ESTES

This essay originally appeared as the introduction to “250 Years of Counterrevolution” in the August issue My Pen Is My Machete, the magazine for the Anti-Imperialist Scholars Collective.

September 9, 2026—This past July, the United States celebrated the 250th anniversary since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. This issue of *The Pen is My Machete* brings together anti-imperialist perspectives on the meaning of that founding for the rest of the world and the world’s first nation born entirely as a capitalist state. Historian Gerald Horne has convincingly argued that the 1776 American Revolution was, in fact, a counter-revolution—one that locked down and expanded the plantation economy and delayed the abolition of African slavery in North America (and perhaps the emancipation of the earth from capital) for nearly a century. A counter-revolution led by property owners—men whose wealth was counted in the flesh of Black human beings and the lands of Indigenous peoples—saw the writing on the wall as enslaved people across the British colonies began rising up, their clamor for freedom threatening to tear down the nightmarish institution of bondage. It is no wonder African peoples of the North American colonies took up arms with the British, choosing red coats over the chains of European-American colonists who sought to expand their plantation empires by seizing yet more Indigenous land.

1776 was also a counter-revolution for the Indigenous nations of North America.

Prior to the 1776 war, Indigenous warriors fought alongside the French against British colonists who were pushing past the Appalachian crest and pouring into the Ohio River Valley during the French and Indian War of 1754–1763. Because of their relentless hunger for land, British

colonists were recognized as a far greater threat to Indigenous sovereignty than their French counterparts. Hoping to pacify Indigenous nations and avoid endless, costly frontier warfare, the British Crown issued promises to stem the tide of colonial settlement in the Ohio Valley. In 1763, King George III pressed his royal seal onto a decree forbidding British subjects from settling Indigenous lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation line implicitly acknowledged the formidable military weight of Indigenous nations, setting the stage for growing confederacies and alliances—such as the one forged by the Odawa leader Pontiac, who rallied ten nations to unleash a wave of coordinated strikes against British forts, fighting to decolonize the Great Lakes before the ink had even dried on the treaties ending the French and Indian War.

The prohibition of western settlement and expansion was an untenable reality for the European-American colonists.

Thomas Jefferson had both the threat of slave rebellions and the reality of Indigenous military strength in

mind when he wrote the 27th and final grievance against the King of England in the Declaration of Independence. “He has excited domestic insurrections among us,” Jefferson wrote, capturing the panic of slaveholders who watched runaway men and women escape into British lines and taking up arms against their former masters under the promise of freedom; “and has endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions,” read the final lines, demonizing the Indigenous alliances defending their homelands.

Thus, the founding document consecrated U.S. policy toward Indigenous nations, framing them as the original enemies of the empire. From that early experience, they created a model of military subjugation and kinetic force that, once it secured its own continent, would export to the rest of the globe.

U.S. national myth promotes the idea that the theft of Indigenous lands and westward expansion were under-



The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776, by John Trumbull – Public Domain

taken for and by the common man—the rugged pioneer and homesteader carving civilization out of wilderness. The colonists’ war for independence against the British Crown and the founding of their ever-expanding republic was framed as a democratic commitment to the many, throwing off the gilded tyranny of European monarchs. The hundreds of treaties that accompanied genocidal wars against Indigenous nations also appear to validate this perspective: a faceless government bureaucracy in Washington stamped red wax onto parchment paper, securing hundreds of millions of acres through “lawful” cessions, redistributing that land to the huddled masses pushing westward in search of *lebensraum* [living space].

While such violence was lamentable, the thinking goes, it was an inevitable, if not necessary, step to achieve the lofty ideals of the U.S. democratic experiment—an experiment that, if wielded properly by the citizenry, could eventually undo its own founding injustices. The most glaring among these original contradictions are Indigenous genocide and the enslavement of African people. The abolition of the latter came about through a civil war that left half-a-million dead on muddy battlefields—the unfulfilled legacy of abolition haunts the present through modern forms of mass incarceration and the racial policing of Black people. And the imperialist wars of conquest that facilitated the former didn’t end when the dust settled behind cavalry columns on the plains—they forged a blueprint for the imperialist wars that raged for centuries and continue today.

How could “the world’s first modern democracy” have enshrined so much violence and inequality upon its founding? This has been the troubling question for generations of scholars—but it is incomplete.

The search for an “original sin” has led to important but ultimately limited

moral crusades against this or that institution for enshrining inequality. This sidesteps the systematic and critical thinking and agency of those who have seized hold of the commanding heights of industry. If we were to put the United States on trial for the mass suffering it has inflicted upon the planet, we would first have to establish the evidence—the crime scenes, the murder weapon, so to speak—and then establish motive—the why of human action, why perpetrate such mass suffering. So far, the evidence continues to mount, but structural intent seems elusive. Grotesque, race hatred or racial superiority alone are insufficient explanations. After all, early Indian hating targeted Indigenous nations not because of cultural or racial difference; they were targeted for destruction because they stood in the way of acquiring their lands and resources. In other words, the profit motive.

54 family dynasties in the United States hoard more wealth than the bottom 165 million Americans combined—the modern inheritors of a state apparatus engineered from its inception to protect and expand private fortunes.

More to the point, it was a particular class of people who benefited from the genocidal wars waged against Indigenous nations. Mainstream histories often frame U.S. expansion as an abstract process. In *The Relentless Business of Treaties*, Martin Case dismantles this theory. He identifies several sprawling, intermarried ruling-class dynasties whose overlapping business and political interests domi-

nated the United States’ nineteenth century treaty negotiations with Indigenous nations. Just five of these family networks accounted for 515 signatures across nearly half of all U.S.-Indigenous treaties, while dozens of smaller families making up a significant portion of the rest. “A single large kinship group might include land speculators, fur traders, mine owners, and the politicians who legislated Indian policy and handed out trading and mining licenses,” writes Case. The conspiracy to take and profit from Indigenous lands and resources rested in the hands of a few, stretching across several generations.

Mainstream commentary often dismisses elite coordination as paranoid conspiracy theory. The late Marxist thinker, Michael Parenti, argues that ruling-class elites routinely conspire—explicitly planning, networking, and using state power to advance their material and collective interests. This is as true with regard to the violent theft of Indigenous lands as it is today.

Today, 54 family dynasties in the United States hoard more wealth than the bottom 165 million Americans combined—the modern inheritors of a state apparatus engineered from its inception to protect and expand private fortunes. When we look past the high-minded rhetoric of the Founders, the central question shifts from how democracy failed to how capitalism succeeded. The genocidal campaigns against Indigenous nations, the enslavement of African people, and the global projection of U.S. military power were never tragic deviations from high-minded liberal ideals; they were the very engine of its wealth accumulation, driven by a ruling class that converted human lives and stolen land into private capital.

The crime scene is vast, stretching from the bloodied banks of the Ohio River Valley to the modern sites of U.S. military intervention across the Global South, set afire from the rubble of Gaza

to the Strait of Hormuz, where cracks begin to show light. Where there is empire, there is resistance. Just as Indigenous alliances and runaway African laborers rose up against the counter-revolution of 1776, the struggle against the U.S. Imperium continues on every front line of liberation today. In this issue of *The Pen is My Machete*, we offer these perspectives not merely to document the machinery of ruling-class power, but to arm the movements fighting to dismantle it.

Nick Estes is a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. He is a journalist, historian and co-host of the Red Nation Podcast. He is the author of Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance (Verso, 2019).

—CounterPunch, September 9, 2026

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/09/09/the-counter-revolution-of-capital/>

The genocidal campaigns against Indigenous nations, the enslavement of African people, and the global projection of U.S. military power were never tragic deviations from high-minded liberal ideals; they were the very engine of its wealth accumulation, driven by a ruling class that converted human lives and stolen land into private capital.

Found, But Not Rescued

BY CATHY OTTEN

September 7, 2026—In the middle of the ocean, a man was drowning. He could not hold fast to the ropes dangling from the bow and stern of the bulk carrier that stopped to help. Below, a small, blue wooden boat crammed with people was tossed by a raging storm. As high winds sloshed water over the deck, the passengers—who had sailed for a day and a night without drinking water—rushed toward the swaying ropes. But the lines slipped through their hands.

The children lacked the strength to climb. Even for the strong, a single slip could mean being crushed beneath the swaying hull of the massive ship.

“We were all very scared in the moment and drove away from [the] big ship,” Daniel, a survivor from Eritrea, reportedly told rescuers, describing how the migrant boat he was on powered away from the larger vessel in fear of being capsized. (Daniel is a pseudonym because survivors of deadly rescues at sea often face criminalization.)

“We tried to help, to throw [life rings],” to the man in the water, Daniel continued, “but he didn’t take it. We saw him go far away and we knew he [was] dying.”

When people drown, they don’t scream or wave; they fall silently. Their mouths gasp at the surface, and their arms and legs move like they’re climbing a ladder underwater—until they simply disappear. As the night’s darkness enveloped the 81 migrants remaining on the wooden boat, the man in the water slipped out of sight.

With no means of navigation, those left on board could only follow the flare of oil platforms as raw markers of north—or look to the stars to guide them.

The migrants’ voyage, which had begun four nights earlier, on May 20,

2025, was described to me in great detail by rescue crewmembers who gathered Daniel’s testimony, along with that of others aboard the blue wooden boat, in the hours after the rescue. The voyage had begun in Libya’s coastal town of Sabratha, where two wooden boats set sail for Italy carrying 245 migrants, according to the rescuers. One of the migrant boats, carrying 128 people, was eventually rescued by the Italian Coast Guard after a civilian alarm system raised an alert.

But Daniel’s boat, carrying 117 people, was less fortunate, hitting bad weather near the Sabratha oil platform more than 60 miles off the Libyan coast.

What unfolded next—including unfinished rescue attempts by passing merchant vessels, three deaths and the return of 35 migrants to a Libyan detention center known for systemic torture—is the subject of intense legal and moral debate, drawing in multiple governments, international agencies, coast guards, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and commercial shipping companies. At its heart lie serious potential violations of international human rights and refugee law.

But the deeper story is structural, rooted in decades of northbound wealth transfer, policies that facilitate unsafe migration routes and systems that drive vulnerable people into the hands of traffickers and abusers.

The 2015 launch of Operation Sophia, a European Union military operation designed to “disrupt human smuggling and trafficking networks,” increased surveillance on the Mediterranean Sea. But deaths at sea never stopped. Regular drones and planes from the European border agency Frontex hum over the waves, but the surveillance is geared at security, not protection. (Frontex disputes this.)

Today, Frontex does not perform rescues; instead, it uses a fleet of planes and drones to spot boats in distress. The agency's crews radio the rescue coordination centers responsible for that stretch of sea, giving them the boats' position, course and speed and copying neighboring centers on the same call, according to Frontex spokesman Chris Borowski.

In situations like Daniel's, the Libyans may intercept the vessels—if they are in the Libyan search and rescue area—using boats donated by Italy. The migrants are then taken, or returned, to detention centers where survivors report widespread abuses.

A huge crisis

In 2025, nearly 8,000 people died or went missing on dangerous migration routes, including those spanning the Mediterranean Sea between Africa and Europe, the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa toward the Canary Islands, and the Horn of Africa toward Saudi Arabia, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). IOM also found that in the same year, “270 human remains washed ashore on Mediterranean coasts,” pointing to untraced shipwrecks.

So far in 2026, at least 990 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean—far more than the

same period last year—including 53 migrants lost at sea in early February, their bodies seemingly washing up on Italy's beaches following a violent winter storm. Days before that disaster, at least 15 migrants died in Greek waters, reportedly after their boat “collided” with a Greek Coast Guard vessel.

The man Daniel watched drown last May might never be included in NGO tallies of the dead. But his death still poses a vital question: Why was he—and later two others from the same boat, another man and a child, according to rescuers—allowed to die while trying to reach one of the wealthiest continents on earth? These are not just tragic accidents; they are potential crimes against humanity that could be prosecuted up official chains of command.

Now, human rights lawyers are asking the International Criminal Court to investigate European leaders, alongside Libyan suspects, following the death of 25,000 asylum seekers and the abuses of 150,000 survivors detained in Libya.

Of the 117 migrants who set off from Libya on the boat with Daniel, only 79 made it to Italy—feverish, fuel-burned and in shock. But all of them—the survivors, the dead and those returned to Libya—were equally victims, not just of the sea, but of hostile migration policies.

These people “are the ones that we know, who have relatives back in Africa, in the Middle East, who could put the dots together,” said Feliipe Lopes, a bearded Brazilian man then working on board the *Ocean Viking*, a rescue ship operated by European NGO SOS Mediterranée. With emotion in his voice, Lopes recalled, “You see a lot of activity [on that sea]—it is such a busy route with vessels, tankers, container vessels, plus military assets in the air and sea, and yet, people continue to drop constantly.”

“There are thousands of people we don't know about,” Lopes said, “because they are just missing.”

The Ocean Viking

The *Ocean Viking* was part of a group of around a dozen ships sponsored by civil society groups that work to bring migrants stranded in the Central Mediterranean ashore to Europe, filling the void left by the end of Italian rescue operation “*Mare Nostrum*,” or “*Our Sea*”—a massive search-and-rescue effort that saved thousands of lives until it was ended, thanks to political and financial pressure, in 2014.

At first, NGO rescue boats hoping to replace the Italian mission worked in concert with European authorities, but their movements later became increasingly restricted after Italy introduced new hard-line, anti-immigration legislation framed as anti-smuggling. (The Italian Coast Guard still performs rescues between Tunisia and the Italian island of Lampedusa, but it does not usually operate farther south towards Libya.)

Today, the NGO rescue boats attract a band of mostly European sailors with a punk aesthetic who reject the continent's far-right, anti-migration turn and want to practice the dying art of humanitarianism.

The *Ocean Viking* is a large, red-and-white offshore tugboat, equipped with radar, a small hospital and living quarters for the crew. I joined the boat to document the crew's rescue work in



The crew of the *Ocean Viking*, a migrant rescue ship operated by European NGO SOS Mediterranée, uses a practice dummy to conduct a rescue training exercise in May 2025.

May 2025. We set sail from Syracuse, Sicily, and from there, veered south through a large storm towards Libya, pausing off the coast of Tunisia by the port city of Sfax to rescue 276 shipwrecked migrants. The morning of that rescue, an alert sounded at 3:53 A.M. on the ship's radios. Seafarers pulled on their life vests, boots and waterproof trousers in the storeroom; out on deck, the lifeboats were being lowered down and hit the water by 4 A.M.

In the dark, fear of the unknown often freezes migrants, one sailor told me, and rescuers rely on this alarm at the sight of an unknown ship to help keep migrant boats at a safe distance. This is the moment when most rescues go wrong, since migrants are often so relieved that they start to celebrate—sometimes jumping up and down, inadvertently causing their ship to capsize. But fear of the unknown can also keep survivors still while translators on the rescue ship explain that they're sending out smaller boats to meet them.

Out on the deck of the Ocean Viking after the rescues, the Mediterranean air was warm and the sea calm. It was black night but there was light from the moon. Below me was the dark sea, swirling like milky blue tea and churning frothy whirlpools against the lifeboats now launching on the port side.

Amid the hum of the generators, sloshing of seawater and clomping of rubber boots, there was an atmosphere of sad diligence and worn-down optimism, broken occasionally by levity and games. The drama and intensity of the rescues was punctuated by long hours watching the waves; groups of migrant men passed the time sleeping or smoking. The sailors washed the deck and organized food handouts, tea and hot chocolate stations, and lines for the migrants to wash and charge their phones. One morning, I watched a sailor bent down, absorbed in the task of trying to dry a soaking wet passport with a hair dryer.

In the early 1990s, Spain and Italy introduced visa requirements for North African migrants, closing a period of some fluid movement. Before the Western-led wars in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, migration across the Mediterranean was mostly viewed in economic and not criminal terms. This shifted after the 2011 Libyan war, which “opened the door of Africa to Europe,” said Felippo Aquilino, another rescuer on board the Ocean Viking.

Non-refoulement is a core principle under international human rights law prohibiting states from returning a person to a territory where they face real risks of persecution or irreparable harm.

Aquilino, a Sicilian with salt-and-pepper hair, had known about the migrant route since a fishing boat full of strangers crashed outside his family's cabin on the south coast of Lampedusa when he was five years old. He sat talking to me on the deck of the boat under bright sunshine and a strong wind. As an outpost that represents one of the nearest parts of Europe to Africa, Lampedusa has become such a symbol of the deadly Mediterranean crossing that Pope Francis famously made it the destination of his first official trip outside Rome in 2013, celebrating mass on an altar fashioned from the wood of shipwrecked migrant boats.

During the second rescue on the morning of May 17, day broke in full color over the deck as the survivors appeared, clambering up from the lifeboats one by one into the morning and the noise and heat of the engines. And then there on the horizon was another

blue wooden boat, listing violently and full of people frozen with fear. The rescuers pulled them into their lifeboats, water moving below their feet as they worked. It's a strange environment for land people to work in, one of the sailors told me later.

The survivors had been sailing for days. They told me stories of trying to reach Europe on crowded boats, only to be captured at sea and sent back by Libyan forces, presumably the EU-equipped Libyan Coast Guard.

Trying to cross

The day after he was rescued, Ahmed—a Marxist from Sudan who said he fled Darfur in 2019, when his political activism made him an enemy of both the government and the rebels—told me that, for him, “There's no way back, because I refuse two systems, not one.” He tried to cross the sea to reach Europe five times between 2019 and 2025, but each time, he was returned by Libyan patrol boats. Sometimes, he was sent back and freed along with his fellow travelers. But on other occasions, he said, he was sent to jails where he was tortured. Once, he was forced to pay the equivalent of \$310 for his freedom. After his release, militias in Misrata forced him to work as a cleaner and guard—sometimes for pay, sometimes not, in a mix of indentured servitude and slavery.

Sitting on the deck of the Ocean Viking and looking out at the sea, a metal cross round his neck, another migrant named Josef described leaving Ethiopia's city of Gondar because he couldn't find work or money. In Libya, he'd been captured and sent to jail four times: twice for trying to cross the sea and twice just for being on the street. In jail, he said, he'd been kicked “like an animal” by guards until he could gather the bribe money to escape.

Sitting with the women and children outside their sleeping quarters, Helen, a young woman with a mournful air, said she was traveling with her husband. She

was tired and withdrawn and didn't join in when the other women sang and danced on deck with relief. The couple traveled from Ethiopia to Sudan and then Libya, where her husband took menial work. "Sometimes," Helen recalled, the militia men "took him away, kidnapped him, and asked for money to release him." The first time she tried to cross the sea, Libyans shot at their plastic boat and forced them off. "The men jumped in the water and the women cried, 'Our brothers, please help get them.'" The men were rescued and then beaten by the guards.

The second time, she was at sea for 12 hours before being captured and taken back to a prison in Libya, where she was held for nine months. She didn't have words to describe how bad the treatment was there; when I asked about it, her eyes filled with tears, and she began to rock back and forth.

From Sfax, we headed to northern Italy, more than 600 miles away, to disembark the survivors under orders from Italian maritime authorities. After four days sailing together, I watched as the migrants stepped down from the boat, many without shoes or socks, to meet a delegation of local officials, the Italian Red Cross and the police. From here, they would start the next part of their journeys. A month later, Ahmed met the photographer I was traveling with, Ali, in Paris. Ahmed had walked all the way to France, crossing the Alps, with the help of kind strangers who treated his worn-out feet and bad stomach.

In 2013, after the Arab Spring pro-democracy revolutions and foreign interventions curdled into war, crisis and displacement, Italy responded to the surge in migrant crossings and deaths at sea by launching "Mare Nostrum." However, responsibility was later shifted to Frontex, which emphasized border security over rescue, creating a deadly gap in the Central Mediterranean.

In a 2025 press release, Frontex boasted of a 20 percent drop in "irregu-

lar border crossings" into Europe in the first five months of the year, attributing the decline to thousands of their officers working with national authorities to "safeguard borders and save lives at sea."

Frontex's budget surged to 1.1 billion euros in 2026, with an emphasis on funding high-tech surveillance. The agency relies on the Heron 1 drones manufactured by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and contracts with Airbus to provide surveillance drones over the Mediterranean. The agency frames this as a tool for safety, but the nearly one billion euros committed to long-term aerial surveillance since 2024 has done little to stop the death toll. Instead, it has facilitated a policy of remote detection and Libyan interception.

Frontex's mixed role

Frontex spokesman Chris Borowski said in response to inquiries from *In These Times*: "Detection is what starts the rescue. In 2025, Frontex assets contributed to saving 33,000 lives, and we're past 7,000 already this year. ... On the interception chain and non-refoulement: we comply with non-refoulement in everything we do, full stop."

(Non-refoulement is a core principle under international human rights law prohibiting states from returning a person to a territory where they face real risks of persecution or irreparable harm.)

Borowski added: "When one of our aircraft finds a boat that's about to sink, the job in that moment is to stop people from drowning. Saving those lives has to come first, because the alternative is watching people drown while everyone works out the politics. What a government does after an interception, Italy, Libya, or anyone else, is a separate and serious question, but it doesn't change the fact that reporting a boat in distress is what keeps the people on it alive long enough for that question to even come up."

"I don't dispute that the reports of torture and extortion in Libyan deten-

tion are real and well documented. But the fix for that isn't asking Frontex to stop reporting boats in distress, a duty every vessel at sea carries," Borowski said. "It's a decision on the political level. That call isn't ours to make, and we won't speak as though it is."

A medic on board the Sumud Flotilla that sailed towards Gaza in September 2025 recalled watching Frontex drones with his fellow crewmembers. While the drones only monitor migrant traffic, the sheer number of them was disconcerting, said the medic, speaking on the condition of anonymity. The constant air surveillance "felt intimidating and dystopian," he added.

In 2017, the Italian government began introducing rules limiting the operations of NGO ships, followed by new laws carrying penalties in 2019, and further restrictions during the pandemic. Under mounting pressure from the far Right, Italy enacted the "Piantedosi Decree" in 2023. Named after Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi, the law imposed strict new limitations on NGO rescue operations, requiring vessels to head immediately to the port designated by authorities after every rescue and making "multi-rescue" missions much harder. That has the effect of reducing the time rescuers can spend at sea answering distress calls, driving up costs and increasing the likelihood of criminalization if paperwork is not filed correctly. Ships are now regularly detained for conducting additional rescues after being assigned a port of disembarkation.

Far-right politicians began to denigrate NGO operators as "sea taxis" or accomplices to smugglers, said the Ocean Viking's Aquilino. This criminalization is a key vector in Europe's broader hostility to migrants from countries destabilized by corruption, repression and Western-backed wars and economic policies.

The impact on operations has been huge. Before the war against NGO

ships began, Aquilino said, the Ocean Viking spent roughly 300 days a year patrolling for distressed boats; under the Piantadosi Decree, that has dropped to 180 days. It was a sad irony that a year after the EU received the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize for decades of contributions to peace, democracy and human rights worldwide, “they started closing the borders and stopping the rescues,” he added.

After the EU signed a deal with Turkey in 2016 to reduce migration, Ocean Viking crewmember Lopes said there was a sudden increase in the number of Frontex personnel, boats, airplanes, drones and bases around Lesbos, the Greek island off Turkey that had become the epicenter of migrant arrivals to Europe. In 2015, when Kurdish-Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi washed up drowned on a Turkish beach, global attention turned to Lesbos and the NGO presence on the island soared. Frontex personnel filled restaurants, along with members of the Greek Coast Guard and army. States began arresting humanitarian activists. The crackdown in Greek-Turkish waters, said Lopes, made the far more dangerous Central Mediterranean route, one of the deadliest in the world, much more popular.

The EU, the Italian foreign ministry, the Maltese maritime authorities, the Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre and the Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre did not respond to requests for comment from *In These Times*, nor did Israeli Aerospace Industry or Airbus.

As his rescuers recount it, Daniel arrived alone at the rocky shore in Sabratha, Libya, last spring, ready to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, as merchants and sailors had done for thousands of years. He had already travelled more than 1,200 miles from his home in the closed dictatorship of Eritrea. On May 20, 2025, there was a storm brewing out beyond the oil rigs,

as 245 passengers clambered aboard two 23-foot wooden boats, one painted bright blue.

Daniel was last to board the boat with a tall, jutting prow, a weak engine and not enough fuel. As the passengers reached the high seas that night, waves crashed against the skiff, upsetting fuel cans. Passenger vomit mixed with urine, kerosene and seawater, creating a noxious slurry below deck in the tightly packed hold. The next morning, the storm worsened, and a passenger sent out a phone alert. The Italian Coast Guard rescued one boat but did not return for Daniel’s. The Libyan Coast Guard sent a boat from Zawiyah, 30 miles west of Tripoli, to intercept the migrants and return them to Libya, but they hit bad weather, Ocean Viking crewmembers later told me, forcing the group to turn back.

As Daniel’s boat drifted away from the drowning man, the crew of a large merchant ship trying to rescue them sent an urgent mayday signal about possible people in the water, requesting assistance and guidance on what to do with the 35 people they had managed to rescue before the migrant boat pulled away.

The merchant vessel, the MV Bobic, registered in the Marshall Islands, turned south to Libya to return the rescued migrants. The NGO Alarm Phone, which relays messages to rescue boats and authorities from shipwrecked migrants, informed the merchant ship that it was illegal to return migrants to Libya, where there is a credible risk of torture and abuse. A deputy commissioner of maritime affairs for the Republic of the Marshall Islands suggested the merchant vessel go to Tunisia, then asked Libya to take responsibility for the decision, according to emails published by *Alarm Phone*.

Merchant ships operate on strict margins, and any rescue will cost crucial days sailing time for the captain and ship’s company. That evening, a relative

of one of the rescued migrants told *Alarm Phone* that the 35 people who made it onboard the Bobic had been taken to Libya’s al-Nasr detention center in Zawiyah, notorious for torture.

The Ocean Viking was on its way but was still returning from dropping off migrants shipwrecked near Tunisia—including Ahmed, Josef and Helen, whom I’d met—in northern Italy. If it hadn’t been compelled to drop them off first, as the new regulations dictated, it could have been closer to Daniel’s boat, and more people may have survived.

On May 25, 2025, the evening after the MV Bobic rescue, another merchant ship, the MV Eco One, approached the 81 migrants, including Daniel, still adrift. The Eco One was roughly six times the size of their boat, but the survivors were so exhausted and scared of the bruising storm that they apparently lost fear of other threats and bravely tried to approach the ship’s colossal, metal hull.

The crew of the Eco One threw down a small rope with a ring at the end. The migrants rushed to climb aboard, and in the scrum, four people fell into the water, Daniel told the Ocean Viking’s crew. The Eco’s crew threw life rings down into the swell to catch the fallen. Two survivors were pulled from the water and hauled back onto the wooden boat, but the other two—one man of around 25 and a child of 13—were too far away, according to Daniel’s account.

“We [sailed] away from the second ship as we saw too many people falling down. We were scared because of what happened with the rope. Everyone went for themselves,” Daniel told the Ocean Viking crew.

During the rescue attempt, the crew of the Eco One managed to recover 26 people from the boat before aborting the rescue due to the storm. The Italian maritime authorities then told the Eco One to take the survivors to Lampedusa

and rescue the remaining shipwrecked people once weather conditions allowed. The Ocean Viking, then about an hour away, also received the order.

Neither the deputy commissioner of maritime affairs for the Republic of the Marshall Islands nor the management companies of the MV Bobic and Eco One responded to requests for comment.

At this point, Daniel and his fellow migrants still caught in the storm saw what could be another ship in the distance—possibly an oil rig resupply vessel, its deck lit up like a Christmas tree, so bright that “it blinded us,” according to Daniel. They called out to the ship, asking anyone on board to help them, but “no one listened,” he recalled. He went down below deck into the cramped hold and tried not to think about the storm, or the juddering prow threatening to break, or the lack of fuel, or the sick passengers.

When the Ocean Viking approached Daniel’s boat, it was midnight and the sea was black. A video of the rescue shows a headlamp jutting over bouncing, black waves, until the lights of the oil tanker that had passed by appeared in the distance. In the foreground is the tiny migrant boat, spinning on the swell.

The Ocean Viking rescuers couldn’t see anyone out on deck, but as they drew closer, a man shouted out, “there are more of us down below.”

As the Ocean Viking’s lifeboats finally reached the skiff, Aquilino noticed a strong smell of diesel. Many of the passengers were in various states of shock, he said, and most of them were sheltering below deck in the space filled with water. The women below deck “were not okay,” said Lopes.

The next day, he recalled seeing one woman whose eyes were rolling back in her head. “She was not there,” Lopes said. Aquilino described a woman who had fallen in the water as appearing to have just come “back from the dead.” In the aftermath of the rescue, she

cried out for her brother, who may have been one of the men who drowned, according to Aquilino. The survivors were so traumatized that it was difficult for the rescuers to understand exactly what happened.

As European rights groups, humanitarian organizations, and lawyers push for accountability, the violent reality continues at sea. In early 2017, Italy signed an anti-migration deal with Libya, including significant support in the form of training and resources for the Libyan Coast Guard. Later that year, the Italian government invited Abd al-Rahman Milad—a notorious human trafficker as well as a chief of the Libyan Coast Guard—to Sicily to discuss anti-migrant coordination, even though a UN report determined Milad and his unit were responsible for shootings at sea.

This model of cutting deals in exchange for a reduction in migration flows is defined by a lack of a unified EU strategy that will “at best sustain the *status quo*,” said Mark Micallef, a director at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. “This is more or less the model that Gaddafi himself had established, an extortion-type model where ‘you give me money or I will send more migrants,’” Micallef continued. “What we see now is the proliferation of that model across Libya.”

But not only have these deals failed to prevent migrant flows, they are also driving instability, according to experts. In Libya, human smuggling and trafficking industries are “putting money in the hands of militias that are then in a much better position to undermine the political process and the peace process,” according to Micallef. A better approach, he said, should include a greater emphasis on law enforcement, actually going after high-level criminals, alongside a visa scheme and refugee track, as well as “red lines” for partnership countries. “You need to be able to say actually this is a line we won’t cross,” he said.

Allison West of the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights said pushbacks at sea to Libya mark the beginning of “the severe deprivation of liberty as a crime against humanity.”

“People are deprived of their liberty at sea and then taken straight into detention centers in a systematic manner,” West said. Referring to EU deals with Libya, she added that this process “establishes a pathway for individual criminal responsibility for high-ranking officials in charge of the policies that make this whole system possible.”

When Italian authorities control a rescue at sea, West said, this can be enough “to establish the co-perpetration” of crimes against humanity, provided migrants are subsequently pushed back to Libyan detention sites, where some become victims of enforced disappearances. Because these disappearances occur with the direct knowledge or acquiescence of state authorities, West added, “they also impose a number of positive obligations on states to search for, to investigate and to continue until the whereabouts of the person are actually found and known.”

In an October 2025 submission to the International Criminal Court, a group of lawyers accused 120 European leaders of committing crimes against humanity alongside Libyan suspects. Following a similar attempt six years earlier, the submission names the European officials as co-perpetrators in the deaths of 25,000 asylum seekers, as well as abuses against some 150,000 survivors “abducted and forcibly transferred to Libya, where they were detained, tortured, raped, and enslaved.”

Now, even the rescuers are coming under attack. Humanitarian vessels threaten the financial and logistical arrangements between the EU and Libya. For the militias running Libyan detention centers, these ships undermine the cyclical business model of extortion. West describes the violence directed at rescue boats as “a maritime front of this broader containment policy.”

In August 2025, the Ocean Viking came under heavy machine gun fire, reportedly from Libyan forces sailing a vessel gifted by Italy. The attack destroyed the Viking's antennas, broke four windows and damaged three rescue boats and rescue equipment, grounding the ship and stopping all rescues for about four months. Aquilino, on board at the time, said the gunfire was intense. He heard the metallic clink of bullets hitting the roof, windows and doors of the bridge.

"We were all falling down on the floor," he said, hiding and "waiting for it to finish."

By early morning on May 26, all 53 survivors remaining in Daniel's boat after the Eco One rescue made it on board the Ocean Viking. The Italians instructed the ship to drop them off in Livorno, Tuscany, approximately 560

miles away. Five survivors were medically evacuated, including a teenager whose skin had been burned by exposure to fuel in the hold of the boat, as well as her baby. Along with her went a man with a broken arm who fell while attempting to climb the rope during the first rescue and a woman who Aquilino said inhaled too much seawater, likely developing a lung infection.

Next, the Ocean Viking dropped off the dozens of lone children, along with the handful still with family members, in Sicily, following an appeal from the NGO to the island's public prosecutor. But the Italian authorities did not allow the remaining 13 survivors to disembark there. Instead, the Ocean Viking traveled north to Livorno.

On May 29, the Ocean Viking dropped off the remaining passengers. The original group of 117 migrants had

been split among three ports and one Libyan detention center. Three had drowned. According to the rescuers, on arrival in Italy, security officials were there to question the survivors.

Angelo Selim, the Ocean Viking's search and rescue coordinator, who later spoke to me on the phone, detailed the harrowing journey of the survivors: the separation across distant ports, untreated injuries and the inhospitable welcome they received in Europe. He described the companions they had watched drown along the way.

"We don't consider these people as humans," he said. "The only reason this can happen is because we dehumanize these people. Until the last day, they suffer from our lack of empathy."

—*In These Times*, September 7, 2026

<https://inthesetimes.com/article/migrant-deaths-mediterranean-sea-europe>

ICE is Taking Away Healthcare

BY RAMYA GOSIKE

September 23, 2026—The cost of healthcare just keeps going up—and millions of Americans are set to lose coverage.

Under the GOP's so-called "Big Beautiful Bill," around 17 million people in this country will lose healthcare thanks to the law's Medicaid cuts, failure to renew Affordable Care Act subsidies and other changes. Those cuts accelerate after this year's midterms.

Instead, that money is going toward tax cuts for the rich plus record budgets for Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Pentagon. Immigrants—including well over 1 million residents who are lawfully present—will be especially hard hit.

Rosa Maria Carranza fled El Salvador's civil war for the United States decades ago, working here and sending money home to support her three children. She missed their milestones as she worked overnight shifts

babysitting and substitute-teaching. Later, she co-founded a preschool.

Now semi-retired and working part-time, her livelihood depends on the Medicare and Social Security benefits she earned by paying taxes into the system for decades. Yet Carranza is now expected to lose Medicare coverage, according to KFF Health News.

Even while immigrants are losing healthcare coverage, they continue to pay billions into the system.

Carranza is just one of the 100,000 lawfully present immigrants who are expected to be cut out of Medicare—and one of 1.4 million projected to lose their healthcare overall from other

changes under the law, the Kaiser Family Foundation calculates. Meanwhile, intensified ICE raids have led many immigrants to avoid getting care for fear of being detained by ICE.

President Trump and many other MAGA Republicans tried to justify these deep healthcare cuts by accusing immigrants of taking care away from citizens. This is a lie—instead, millions of citizens are losing their own healthcare in part to fund ICE's crackdown on immigrants.

Undocumented immigrants are not allowed to enroll for Medicaid and Medicare, and they're ineligible to purchase healthcare through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace. Even before the Big Beautiful Bill, immigrants needed to have a "qualified" immigration status to be eligible for Medicaid—and most would still have to wait five years after gaining qualified status to enroll. While lawfully present immigrants can

also qualify for Medicare, they first must have “sufficient” work history.

As a result of factors like these, lawfully present immigrants are more than three times as likely as U.S. citizens to be uninsured. And both lawfully present and undocumented immigrants use less healthcare due to higher uninsured rates, language barriers, and fear of ICE.

Addressing this country's health inequities means closing our massive wealth gap, not scapegoating immigrants.

The Big Beautiful Bill will make this worse. The law restricts the definition of qualified immigrants who are eligible for Medicaid as well as Medicare, excluding legally present refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants on certain work visas, and others. And, of course, that's alongside deep cuts to Medicaid

itself that will cause millions of citizens to lose their coverage as well.

Even while immigrants are losing healthcare coverage, they continue to pay billions into the system. In 2022, immigrants paid \$579 billion in taxes—including \$96.7 billion from undocumented immigrants. Moreover, since immigrants are more likely to work in physically demanding jobs with lower wages and weaker benefits, they may have a greater need for the care they're being systematically denied.

Cracking down on immigrants was never going to restore healthcare to U.S. citizens. In fact, since Medicaid cuts are helping to fund this ICE crackdown, it's doing the opposite. Meanwhile, the extremely wealthy Americans who got their taxes cut by the same law can afford gold-plated health plans.

Addressing this country's health inequities means closing our massive wealth gap, not scapegoating immigrants. There must be higher taxation on the wealthy so we can restore and expand health programs like Medicaid and Medicare.

Healthcare is a human right, rooted in the belief that every person deserves dignity and care, regardless of where they were born or what job they work. We must hold accountable those who promote harmful rhetoric that justifies the exclusion of immigrants, which ultimately only hurts all of us.

This op-ed was distributed via OtherWords.org.

—In These Times, September 23, 2026

<https://inthesetimes.com/article/immigrants-healthcare-ice-medicare-medicare-snap-cuts-obbb>

Healthcare is a human right, rooted in the belief that every person deserves dignity and care, regardless of where they were born or what job they work.



Armed federal immigration and law enforcement agents blocking Park Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on January 12, 2026.

The Deportation Economy Is Backfiring

BY EVA ROYTBURG

August 7, 2026—As the Trump administration continues to purge hundreds-of-thousands of workers from the country, Americans aren't simply taking their place. Instead, their jobs appear to be disappearing with them.

The economy lost 23,000 jobs last month, yet the unemployment rate went down as the workforce shrank. America's emerging deportation economy may account for the riddle.

For example, healthcare has been the pillar holding up a weak labor market for the past three years, but in July, the sector added just 22,000 jobs, well below its 36,000 average monthly gain for the year prior. Social assistance, like daycare or services for the elderly and disabled, also slowed.

Those are the sectors “dominated by immigrant labor,” Diane Swonk, chief economist at KPMG¹, told *Fortune*. In 2022, 28 percent of direct care workers in the U.S. were immigrants, up from 21 percent in 2011, according to PHI, a research organization that studies the direct care workforce.

And as the aging population grows, the industry needs to fill nearly a million new positions over the next decade.

Those are precisely the jobs held by many of the roughly 200,000 people whose temporary protected status (TPS) was terminated at the end of July, Swonk noted, adding that 400,000 more Venezuelan workers concentrated in nursing homes, hospitality, and construction are also set to lose their work authorization in October.

The timing could hardly be worse: The labor shock is colliding with state-level cuts to Medicaid, the largest payer for long-term care.

“Even as some employers lose those workers, we're not going to be able to afford to replace them at the wages

necessary,” Swonk warned. “That means rationing, or more people doing unpaid care at home.”

U.S.-born workers didn't fill the gap. Instead, they lost ground, too: For every six male undocumented workers pushed out of the labor market, one U.S.-born male worker also lost employment, the researchers found.

That unpaid care is where the cost transfers onto native-born workers. Family caregivers already provide an estimated \$1 trillion worth of unpaid care annually, with 59 million Americans putting in an average of 27 hours a week, the labor equivalent of

roughly 24 million full-time workers, according to AARP's most recent “Valuing the Invaluable” report.

Swonk said that burden is climbing fast and broadening, noting unpaid eldercare “has gone up quite dramatically, and it's in every single profession.”

Fewer paid caregivers mean more Americans stayed home to provide care themselves, shrinking the labor force further without ever registering as unemployed. “If they're not participating,” Swonk explained, “they won't be counted as unemployed either.” Hence the lower unemployment number.

Bill Adams, chief U.S. economist at Fifth Third Bank, saw the same dynamic: an unemployment rate falling “for the wrong reason ... Immigration compensated for the aging of the workforce in the first few years of the post-pandemic expansion, but that's not happening anymore,” he wrote.

Even outside of the care economy, the evidence is piling up that native-



Roughly 200,000 immigrants' temporary protected status was terminated at the end of July.

born workers aren't filling the jobs of immigrants.

Immigrants make up 26.3 percent of the U.S. construction workforce—and roughly one in three tradespeople—according to an analysis of Census data by the National Association of Home Builders.

If a contractor loses enough workers to delay a project, the demand for everyone else on that project can fall with them.

There is evidence that this is already happening. New research by economists Chloe East and Elizabeth Cox examining the surge in immigration enforcement in Trump's second term found that areas experiencing larger increases in ICE arrests saw employment fall among likely undocumented immigrants.

But U.S.-born workers didn't fill the gap. Instead, they lost ground, too: For every six male undocumented workers pushed out of the labor market, one U.S.-born male worker also lost employment, the researchers found. The damage was worst in construction, where employment among U.S.-born men with a high school degree or less fell three percent after ICE surges.

"Foreign-born and native-born workers complement rather than purely substitute for each other," Swonk said. "They affect the entire ecosystems of regional economies."

—*Fortune*, August 7, 2026

<https://fortune.com/2026/08/07/deportation-economy-july-jobs-report-immigrants-ice-raids/>

1 Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) is an American-British-Dutch multinational professional services network headquartered in London, England.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KPMG>

Inside Tacoma's ICE Detention Center

BY SOFIE VILLA



Outside the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington.

September 7, 2026—The inhumanity concealed behind the walls of the Northwest ICE Processing Center (NWIPC) exposes an ICE detention system in which private companies profit from the imprisonment of immigrants in abusive facilities where their human needs, health, and dignity are effectively denied.

At the Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma, Washington, thousands of complaints have been lodged by immigrant detainees regarding dangerous living conditions: abuse, inedible food, prolonged isolation, and medical neglect.

Despite more than 3,500 complaints being submitted to the Washington State Department of Health, GEO Group, operating the facility under a contract with ICE, has repeatedly refused to admit state inspectors.

Opened in 2004, the facility formerly known as the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) has a stated bed space capacity of 1,575 people—one of the largest immigration prisons in the country. Its population hovered around 800 for a couple years before rising sharply after Trump's sec-

ond term began, with immigrant rights groups estimating that 1,400-1,500 people were detained there in March.

Food budgeted at 97-cents-per-meal

Food, water and air quality account for more than 990 of these complaints. Detainees report finding burned plastic, metal string, rope, wood splinters and even worms in their meals. In one case, raw meat was served to a unit of 54 people. Some were so hungry they ate the food anyways—causing 15 of them to become sick.

Other complaints describe drinking water as "foul" and that air coming from the vents smells like sewage. One detainee told immigrant rights group La Resistencia that food served at the NWIPC contained rat feces.

The evidence of the poor quality of food and water is not limited to detainee complaints. During an unannounced inspection in 2022, the Department of Homeland Security found long-expired food and boxes of meat left open and exposed to the air.

In May 2025, detainees reported stomach pain, bloating, and bloody

diarrhea after eating collard greens served at the facility. The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department later detected *Bacillus cereus*, a bacterium associated with food poisoning, in the supply of collard greens.

A former GEO kitchen supervisor testified that the company budgeted only 97-cents-per-detainee-per-meal, and admitted that GEO could not provide adequate meals within that budget. In 2024, GEO reported more than \$1.6 billion in revenue for its secure service facility operations in the U.S.

The facility's problems extend beyond food. More than 650 complaints concern unsanitary living conditions, including black mold in showers, rarely cleaned bathrooms and dirty floors. At one point, approximately 100 people reportedly had access to only two working bathrooms.

Detainees also report receiving wet or dirty laundry, underwear previously worn by others, and bedding that had not been changed or cleaned after being used by people infected with COVID-19 and chickenpox.

Medical neglect accounts for more than 900 additional complaints. Detainees report untreated strokes, paralysis, internal bleeding, heart conditions and asthma. In one case, a man returned from a hospital with prescribed medication, but facility staff withheld it and gave him ibuprofen while his condition continued to deteriorate.

The complaints also contain allegations of physical and sexual abuse by officers.

Deaths and prolonged isolation

Reports also include one death by suicide, several suicide attempts, and extreme isolation.

Mergensana Amar, a 40-year-old asylum seeker, committed suicide in November 2018 after nearly 11 months in the NWIPC.

Charles Leo Daniel was found dead in March 2024 after spending over

three years combined in solitary confinement over two separate periods in 2020 and 2023.

University of Washington researchers also obtained 911 records documenting at least six suicide attempts at the facility between January 1 and March 18, 2024.

The UN's Nelson Mandela Rules define any solitary confinement lasting longer than 15 consecutive days as "prolonged solitary confinement," which is prohibited. UN human rights experts have warned that prolonged solitary confinement may constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment—and can amount to torture. Charles Leo Daniel spent a combined 1,244 days in solitary confinement.

GEO repeatedly blocks state inspections

Despite thousands of complaints and mounting evidence, GEO has kept these conditions hidden from the public—the company has repeatedly blocked attempts by the state to examine conditions inside the facility.

Washington health inspectors were denied entry ten times, including twice after a federal appeals court affirmed the state's authority to inspect private detention centers.

Finally, on July 9, 2026, a federal judge intervened, ordering GEO to admit state inspectors into most of the facility, on the basis that complaints had raised "compelling concerns" for the health and safety of detainees.

But federal findings extended beyond health and hygiene concerns, revealing that GEO also relied on detained workers to perform the labor necessary to operate the NWIPC, paying them as little as one-dollar-per-day.

A federal jury found that GEO had violated Washington's minimum-wage law, and the company was ordered to pay \$17.3 million to more than 10,000 formerly detained workers.

Organizing to shut down the NWDC

Immigrant rights groups have been organizing to shut down the NWIPC for over a decade. La Resistencia recently joined with Tsuru for Solidarity outside the NWIPC to host a Solidarity Day on August 15, demanding the facility's closure.

La Resistencia was founded in 2014, after more than 1,200 detainees launched a hunger strike against their confinement and living conditions. Led by undocumented immigrants, La Resistencia has supported hundreds of hunger strikes and protests organized by detainees in the facility—including holding daily vigils in solidarity with a recent hunger strike.

As organizing continues inside and outside the detention center, these groups are calling on the community to join the fight to shut down the NWIPC and end the deportation flights from King County International Airport.

Sofie Villa is a Seattle-based Filipina artist and organizer with the Party for Socialism & Liberation and a social media content creator under the handle @darlingube.

—*Breakthrough News*, September 7, 2026

<https://breakthroughnews.org/2026/09/07/inside-tacomaworm-infested-food-suicide-and-neglect/>

A Podium for Genocide

BY KARIM

September 26, 2026—Netanyahu walked to the rostrum with an International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant still hanging over him like a joke nobody was laughing at, and he called the delegations that walked out on him “moral cowards.” Think about the arithmetic of that sentence for a second. A man accused, by the highest court humanity has managed to build, of orchestrating the destruction of a captive population, calling other people cowards. And the room let him. The translators translated. The cameras rolled. Somewhere in Gaza a mother was digging with her hands while Netanyahu kept smirking that smirk, unarrested.

Two days before that, Trump had used the same podium to muse aloud about whether to “annihilate” Iran and drive ninety million people “into hell with no chance of survival.” He said it the way I’d wonder aloud whether I want fries or spaghetti. The Canadian prime minister scrolled his phone. Reporters counted the empty seats.

Nobody actually reflected on the absurdity and total moral collapse of the moment: that a U.S. president, standing at the institution supposedly built to prevent exactly this, was indirectly threatening an innocent people with nuclear annihilation. Two days later a prime minister overseeing modern history’s most brutal genocide stood in the same spot, pontificating.

People will tell you the UN is a “forum.” A “space for dialogue.” An “imperfect but necessary” whatever. I’ve heard the phrases my whole adult life. They said the same things about the League of Nations while Mussolini was gassing villages in Ethiopia and Japan was tearing through Nanking. Institutions built to prevent atrocity that instead sit politely through it are

not neutral. There is no neutral. You either interrupt the mass murder or you lend it legitimacy.

Decades of resolutions and “plausible” genocide accusations have done nothing. Zero. Brown University has documented that the American empire’s war on terror has killed millions. The UN stood by, passed some resolutions, and sometimes even greenlit the killing.

**There is no neutral.
You either interrupt the
mass murder or you
lend it legitimacy.**

A global display of moral cowardice

I don’t buy the line that the UN is broken. Broken implies it was ever meant to work the way we were told. Look at what it actually does, consistently, decade after decade: it launders Empire. It gives the powerful a place to say their crimes out loud in diplomatic language and walk out through a side door absolved.

The delegates who got up and left when Netanyahu started talking... That was the only honest gesture of the whole week. And even that was choreography, because they’ll be back next September, and he or someone worse will be back next September, and Empire’s mass murder will continue next September.

And in the backrooms, they will all kiss Netanyahu’s feet and sign fresh arms deals for weapons field-tested on Palestinian children.

Disband the UN

And this is what I cannot get past. This is the part where my brain just stops working. The United Nations was founded, in 1945, for two reasons and two reasons only: to prevent another genocide, and to prevent the use of nuclear weapons. Those were the ghosts it was built to keep buried.

The UN was built out of the ruins of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. And this year, in the span of forty-eight hours, on that same stage, under that same blue flag, we watched a man credibly

Continued on page 15



Trump and Netanyahu

Israel's Ethnic Cleansing Plan for Gaza

BY TAREQ S. HAJJAJ

September 21, 2026—On November 25, 2025, Wissam Yassin, 50, left the Gaza Strip with her two daughters through the Kerem Shalom crossing, as part of an evacuation organized by the French Embassy. It came after several attempts by Yassin, who works for the U.S.-funded *Alhurra* television channel, and her ex-husband, who works for *Radio France*, to secure a way out for their two daughters.

Yassin and her family were instructed to go to a UNICEF facility, after which the French Embassy took responsibility for their departure. They left *via* the Rafah Crossing, traveled through Kerem Shalom, reached Jordan, and were flown directly to France.

"I felt as though I had been uprooted from my place and taken somewhere else," Yassin, who cared for her children on her own throughout at least five displacements, said. "I wished I could stay in Gaza, but at the same time, I wanted a future and a dignified life for my children."

Yassin's family is one of thousands of families forced to leave Gaza since October 2023—through embassy evacuations, academic fellowships, and World Health Organization (WHO) medical corridors. These are the only channels through which departure is currently possible, and they move slowly and selectively. The people who leave do so while fully aware that they may not be able to return, but they're

also aware that Israeli officials have openly stated, at the highest levels of government, that emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population is an explicit policy and ultimate goal.

The displacement plan

Israeli statements calling for the removal of Gaza's population have not been hidden. Since the beginning of the war, Israeli officials have repeatedly and publicly made them.

The first major step toward displacement came in October 2023, when more than 1.1 million Palestinians were pushed from northern Gaza toward the south, a move widely described as a possible prelude to forcibly removing the population through the Rafah crossing. Egyptian opposition to Israeli and U.S. pressures to take in the displaced population prevented it and kept the population inside Gaza.

On September 2, 2026, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said there was "no real solution for Gaza" without such forced migration, and that "Israel would facilitate Palestinian migration from Gaza to other places by sea, air, and every possible means."

The following day, National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir revealed a national action plan for what he called the "voluntary migration" of Palestinians of Gaza, targeting 1.8 million residents over seven years, with around 250,000 people to be removed in the first year.

On September 16, Katz said it's only a matter of time before Israel resumes war on Gaza and encourages its people to evacuate the Strip.

In March 2025, Israeli media reported the establishment of the Voluntary Emigration Administration, within its Ministry of Defense, dedicated to working out destinations to send the people of Gaza to, in collaboration with its allies.

"Israel was also interested in removing people it considered wanted; its objective was not limited to killing people but was part of a deeper strategic goal of emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population."



Palestinian patients accompanied by their relatives line up to depart Gaza for the Rafah crossing for treatment abroad, June 17, 2026. (Photo: Tariq Mohammad/APA Images)

“They kill the idea of steadfastness itself”

Palestinian writer and academic Yousri Al-Ghoul, 46, spent the entire duration of the war in northern Gaza—a region that has been deliberately cut off from the rest of the Strip, subjected to prolonged siege and starvation, and endured some of the most relentless bombardment of the entire genocide, with entire neighborhoods razed and its population reduced to a fraction of what it was before October 2023. Through it all, the father of six was active on social media, calling on people to remain steadfast and stay in the Strip.

On December 15, 2025, he and his family were evacuated to Switzerland through an academic fellowship with a university in Lausanne. While in northern Gaza, Al-Ghoul had lived with the fear of being assassinated, as Israeli forces have persistently targeted writers, intellectuals, and prominent figures in Gaza throughout the war.

After avenues for survival in Gaza had been exhausted, Al-Ghoul contacted friends in European countries and asked for help evacuating his family of six to ensure their safety.

According to Al-Ghoul, there are three main channels through which people can currently leave Gaza: family reunification for Palestinians with European citizenship or residency who can apply to bring family members stranded in the Strip; WHO medical evacuations for patients and their families; and academic fellowships for students or academics.

Beyond these options, al-Ghoul says, there are no other ways to leave Gaza.

Al-Ghoul is candid about what his own departure, as an influencer with significant followship, means in the context of Israel's broader objectives. “Israel was also interested in removing people it considered wanted; its objective was not limited to killing people but was part of a deeper strategic goal of emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population.”

He frames his own case with particular clarity. “When Yousri Al-Ghoul leaves Gaza—the man who had called for steadfastness since the beginning of the war and urged the people of northern Gaza to remain in the north and not leave—the objective achieved by the occupation through his departure is greater than killing him,” he explained. “By forcing me to leave, they kill the idea of steadfastness itself.”

In announcing the Voluntary Emigration Administration, Katz reportedly said the directorate will operate in coordination with international organizations and other governing bodies, in accordance with government instructions, and will coordinate the activities of relevant ministries.

Israel’s plan: create the conditions that make it impossible for people to subsist, and they will “voluntarily” seek an escape from the intolerable.

Al-Ghoul doesn’t assume that European organizations and institutions evacuating Palestinians are necessarily acting to help Israel implement its displacement plans. “They are motivated by humanitarian concerns and believe they are helping Palestinians by removing them from Gaza instead of leaving them to face death and killing alone,” he noted.

That does not, however, change the reality that it is proceeding according to Israel’s plan: create the conditions that make it impossible for people to subsist, and they will “voluntarily” seek an escape from the intolerable.

“Soft migration”

Ahmad Mahmoud—a pseudonym used to protect his identity—left Gaza in

May 2026 through the World Health Organization. One of his children required treatment abroad. He applied to the WHO, and after months of pursuing it, he was told the entire family could be evacuated to a European country.

The WHO instructed him to go to a camp operated by the organization in Mawasi, Khan Younis, where the family spent the night. The following morning, they boarded a bus to the Kerem Shalom crossing, then to Jordan, and from there to Spain.

Mahmoud says that if any organization were capable of helping Israel empty the Strip, it would be the WHO, because it holds the most comprehensive data and records on Gaza’s population and families.

While stressing that he does not accuse the WHO of complicity, he describes what happened after his family left as evidence of something more than medical evacuation.

“As soon as we reached Jordan, the WHO’s role ended completely,” Mahmoud said. “We were taken over by delegations from the Spanish Foreign Ministry, which began talking to us about asylum and about providing accommodation and a safe place in Spain.”

He described the dynamic as a form of “soft migration,” whereby families leaving through humanitarian channels with the intention of returning once the option becomes available are being steered immediately toward asylum applications and permanent settlement abroad.

“Here, nobody knows me”

For Wissam Yassin, the physical distance from Gaza has not resolved the international conflict her departure created.

“Although leaving was an opportunity to survive,” she said, “I did not want to leave Gaza. I never wanted to leave the Strip this way. I always loved traveling and then coming back, but I never imagined that I would leave in a way that meant I could not return.”

"It was a shock to be in a tent, a woman alone without a family, without anyone to support me or help me through the difficult life of displacement, and then, overnight, find myself in Paris. It was a shock by every measure."

Although friends and colleagues in Gaza envied her for being able to leave Gaza, she says she felt like "a plant that had been uprooted and thrown away." Despite being in a safe place with the long-lost possibility of planning and enjoying normalcy, she still feels like a stranger.

"Here, nobody knows me," Yassin said. "Nobody knows who I am or what I am. I left all my history in Gaza, among my family and loved ones who know who I am, what I have done in my life. Here in France, I am completely a stranger."

Yassin says it sometimes occurs to her that European countries working to evacuate Palestinians from Gaza may be helping Israel implement its displacement plans. "But at the same time, people in Gaza deserve a real chance at life," she said. "I am grateful to France for receiving me and giving me enough safety and stability—a home, a safe environment, and a school for my children."

—Mondoweiss, September 21, 2026

<https://mondoweiss.net/2026/09/inside-israels-soft-ethnic-cleansing-plan-for-gaza->

Israeli officials have openly stated, at the highest levels of government, that emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population is an explicit policy and ultimate goal.

Apocalyptic Destruction of Gaza

BY BRETT WILKINS

September 28, 2026—Updated Google satellite imagery shared Monday on social media provides a new perspective on the staggering scale of Israel's obliteration of the Gaza Strip, showing entire neighborhoods reduced to rubble and vast stretches of a formerly dense urban landscape transformed into barren wasteland.

The images from Google—which is accused of complicity in the Gaza genocide—can be viewed on both Google Earth and Google Maps and show extensive destruction throughout the Palestinian territory. In some locations, roads and familiar landmarks remain visible amid enormous fields of gray rubble where homes, businesses, schools, and other civilian structures once stood.

"I've walked through much of the destruction in Gaza myself, but I couldn't bear looking at the map," Palestinian journalist Abubaker Abed posted on social media. "It shows you the Israeli barbarism and terrorism that the world lets happen."

"I've been to those places, I have seen the scale of the destruction—it was really heartbreaking," Abed told *The New Arab*. "But when you see all the destruction in just one active website, it really broke my heart. I couldn't even bear continuing looking at that because seeing the place where I grew up, seeing the place where I was born,

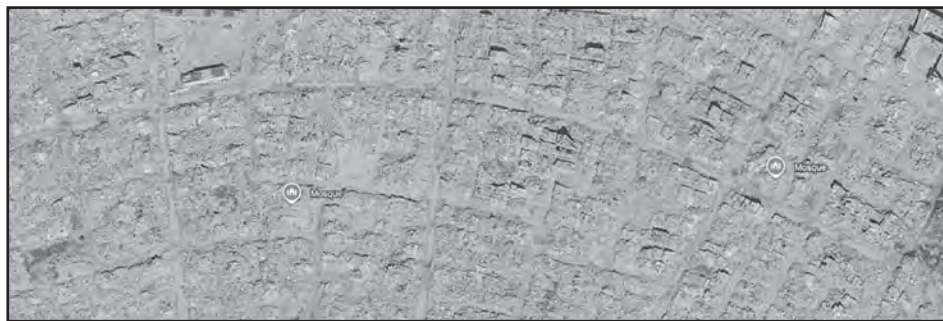
[lying] in ruins in that way was absolutely heart-shattering."

U.S. writer Linda Mamoun noted that "Google Maps shows photos and reviews for thousands of places in Gaza that don't exist anymore. You can scroll through an entire world that Israel destroyed."

The Google images help affirm independent assessments documenting the extraordinary scale of Gaza's destruction. According to the United Nations Satellite Center (UNOSAT), 201,290 structures—or approximately 82 percent of all structures in Gaza—had sustained damage as of June. More than 134,400 structures were classified as destroyed, while over 13,800 were severely damaged. UNOSAT also estimated that 328,627 housing units had been damaged.

The devastation shown in the new imagery is particularly stark in Rafah in southern Gaza. Israel ignored a May 2024 order from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to "immediately halt" its assault on the city of approximately 275,000 people, as well as other acts enumerated in Article II of the Genocide Convention. A South Africa-led genocide case against Israel at the ICJ, is currently in the written phase, which will continue until at least May 2029.

"Look at these satellite images of Gaza and listen to the inconsistency, the hypocrisy, and the ugliness of the



This Google Earth satellite image shows Israel's total destruction of the Tal as Sultan refugee camp in Rafah, Gaza, Palestine.

soul of the deniers... who will tell you above all not to use the word genocide,” wrote Rima Hassan, a French leftist member of European Parliament.

In a social media post, UK journalist David Yelland said: “I recommend spending a few minutes on Google Earth today looking at Gaza. Keeping the media out has meant we have not seen this before. Make your own mind up.”

Another British journalist, Piers Morgan, called the images “horrific.”

“Now we know why [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu continues to ban international media from Gaza,” he added.

A UN report published last week estimates that approximately 1.9 million of Gaza’s roughly 2.2 million peo-

ple have been displaced by Israel’s assault—many of them more than once—and around 60 percent of the strip’s residents have lost their homes. The publication also said that 92 percent of economic establishments in Gaza were destroyed or damaged, and that the territory needs about \$71.5 billion for reconstruction and recovery.

Since launching the war in retaliation for the Hamas-led attack of October 7, 2023, Israeli forces have killed at least 74,022 Palestinians and wounded upward of 175,980 others, according to Gaza officials. The majority of those killed, they say, were women and children. At least 1,421 Palestinians have been killed and 4,983 wounded since the October 2025 ceasefire took effect.

Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, his former minister of defense, are wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, including murder and forced starvation.

Some Israelis and their supporters expressed satisfaction and even pride in the satellite images of Gaza’s annihilation.

“If updated Google satellite images of Gaza have not troubled you, see a doctor,” said Lebanese diplomat Mohamad Safa. “Supporting mass killing and distribution on this scale is really a pathological issue.”

—Common Dreams, September 28, 2026

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/google-satellite-images-of-gaza->

Otherwise Occupied

Israel isn’t debating a Palestinian State. it’s preparing for expulsion

By AMIRA HASS

September 1, 2026—Gadi Eisenkot,¹ the election frontrunner and leader of the Yashar party, has a stance on a Palestinian state that is ultimately irrelevant. What is at stake today is not a “diplomatic solution,” but the very existence of the Palestinian people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Israeli forces striving to “erase” them recognize no limits or restraints. Their supporters are too numerous for us to rely solely on the steadfastness and resilience of a people that has already endured expulsion plans carried out by Israel.

The world stands by. The left is tiny, weak and hoarse from sounding too many warnings. The anti-Bibi opposition oscillates among downplaying the danger, remaining indifferent to it and outright supporting expulsion. The sporadic condemnations, prompted mainly by something the U.S. ambassador posted on X, are about as useful as a sieve in a rainstorm. The Jewish Phalangists² attack constantly and everywhere, not only in Qusra.³

The debate over one state, two states or a federation is more theoretical than ever.⁴ Any agreed-upon solution requires first acknowledging the problem and agreeing on what it is. Too many Jews in Israel have been condi-

tioned to believe that the problem is the very presence in this land of a Palestinian people with roots, historical and economic continuity, cultural capital and material assets, a rich agricultural heritage and a profound love of homeland.



Members of the Jabarin family loading their sheep and goats onto a pickup truck after being evicted from their home in al-Minya village, south of Bethlehem, West Bank, on Friday, August 21, 2026. Israeli police called the expulsion a “human error.” (Photo: Amira Hass / Haaretz)

“Erasure” is the nightmare solution being written into reality every day. Knesset laws, politicians’ declarations, military orders, school textbooks and the holy real estate battalions operating in Gaza, the West Bank and the Negev all work, together and separately, to advance this “solution” diligently and without fear of international condemnation.

Israeli policy is directed toward making life unbearable for Palestinians wherever they live, so that their emigration can be described as an act of free will. Within Israel itself, the authorities give Arab crime organizations free rein to arm themselves and kill Palestinian citizens in their homes. In the West Bank, those same Israeli authorities give “God’s battalions” free rein to arm themselves, kill and expel, while the official army continues its raids day and night. In devastated and thirsty Gaza, the government and the army cultivate armed militias of criminal collaborators, while Israeli pilots continue to launch missiles of revenge and retribution that claim the lives of still more children. All these testosterone-fueled displays are interconnected.

At the same time, Israel is destroying or severely restricting Palestinians’ ability to earn a living. In Gaza, that mission has been completed. A “living dead” population of aid recipients, two million people carrying the weight of some 74,000 fresh graves, families and memories, talents and professions, and evaporated savings, is crammed into roughly 150 square kilometers of scorched earth. Creativity, resourcefulness and mutual aid are dwarfed by the scale of the destruction and by Israel’s prohibition on rebuilding and recovery.

In the West Bank, the Finance Ministry’s⁵ financial noose is tightening around the necks of approximately three million people and the Palestinian Authority. The systematic theft of revenues is compounded by the army’s campaigns of destruction in cities and refugee camps, as well as by the other meth-

ods used to prevent Palestinians from cultivating and developing their land: checkpoints, bureaucratic prohibitions, fences and Israeli-Jewish shepherds.

Within Israel itself, the “Judaization of the Galilee and Negev”⁶ was and remains code for stealing land and resources from Palestinian citizens of Israel. Discrimination against them in allocations, subsidies and employment, along with building prohibitions and demolitions, has always featured prominently in official policy within the Green Line.

Israeli policy is directed toward making life unbearable for Palestinians wherever they live, so that their emigration can be described as an act of free will.

Let me reiterate: The very existence of the Palestinian people between the sea and the river is now in danger. Too many active forces are creating that danger: Israel’s military might and capabilities; the cult of military service under all conditions and under every government; obedience as a value; weapons and military attacks as the default *modus operandi*; the normalization of PTSD among soldiers and of soldiers dying by suicide; the attractions of a military career and the doors it opens; the lure of an affordable villa in a Galilee exclusionary community or a settler suburb in Samaria; the falsehoods of official and unofficial propaganda; indifference to the hell on earth Israel has created in the Gaza Strip; denial of 60 years of occupation and forced rule; the Pavlovian response, “But October 7”⁷; the synergy among the army, the government, the rabbis and the kippa-wearing militias in the

West Bank; equanimity in the face of Lebanon’s destruction; disregard for the occupation of more parts of Syria; the normalization of expulsion discourse; justice and education systems tainted by secular and religious racism; and the army of jailers who abuse thousands of Palestinian prisoners, both under orders and by choice.

Together, these and similar forces are creating the material, ideological and psychological infrastructure within Israeli-Jewish society for another mass expulsion of Palestinians and for what might accompany it: mass slaughter.

The heroes of the settler militias openly declare that expulsion is their goal. They clearly recognize the readiness of large segments of Israeli-Jewish society to participate in carrying it out, actively or passively, directly or indirectly. Through their daily provocations and crimes, committed in broad daylight and made possible only by institutional support, the Phalangists constantly seek to provoke a Palestinian act of rage and revenge that “succeeds,” so that it can be exploited as the match that ignites a new holy war.

The Jewish Phalangists and the right-wing organizations that fuel them are counting on broad mobilization, including from the leaders, voters and supporters of Yashar and the liberal Democrats party,⁸ for a war that could already be given the slogan: “One people, one army, one land cleansed of Arabs.”

Amira Hass is an Islamic journalist, columnist, activist and author. Among her works are, Drinking the Sea at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land under Siege. Owl Books. 2000; (With Rachel Leah Jones) Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land (Semiotext(e), 2003; and Diary of Bergen-Belsen: 1944–1945. Haymarket Books. 2009. A new English language translation of her Sephardi Yugoslav mother Hanna Levy-Hass’ 1946 memoir, with addition of Hass’ foreword and afterwords.

—Haaretz, September 1, 2026

<https://www.haaretz.com/ty-writer/0000017f-da24-d494-a17f-de27b9aa0000>

1 Gadi Eisenkot is the leader of the Yashar party, a frontrunner in Israel's upcoming elections, according to recent opinion polls that give it 22 percent support among Israeli voters. Likud, the right-wing party that leads the current ruling bloc, is rated second with 21 percent support. The legislative elections for the Knesset, the country's parliament, are scheduled for October 27, 2026. Eisenkot is a retired army general who was the chief of staff of Israel's Defense Forces (IDF) from 2015 to 2019 and a minister without portfolio in the Israeli government from 2023 to 2024.

2 During the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Phalangist militia became a major military power, fighting against Palestinian armed groups and leftist or pro-Syrian factions.

3 Beginning in early August, dozens of Israeli settlers surrounded Palestinian homes on a hilltop (Mount Ras al-Ain) in the West Bank village

of Qusra, southeast of the city Nablus, and about 40 miles (64 kilometers) north of Jerusalem. Settlers severed water, electricity, and power lines, pitched tents, and blocked roads to trap families inside and force them off their land. Masked settlers repeatedly attacked the village with stones, set fire to nearby fields, and vandalized or looted properties. Some of the targeted homes belong to Palestinian American families. The Israeli army declared the area a closed military zone and installed new metal gates and roadblocks around the besieged homes, which residents and human rights groups say effectively institutionalized the siege. Humanitarian convoys and activists attempting to deliver food, medicine, and water to the trapped families have been repeatedly blocked or turned away by military forces. The violence and siege in Qusra have drawn international criticism. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu shed crocodile tears by condemning the settler actions. But local residents report that soldiers on the ground have failed to stop the settlers. The nearly month-long siege is still ongoing.

4 For more information see “Palestine/Israel: Edward Said on ‘The One-State Solution’”

<https://world-outlook.com/2026/06/08/palestine-israel-edward-said-on-the-one-state-solution/>

5 Israel's finance minister is Bezalel Smotrich, an ultra-rightist and leader of the far-right Religious Zionist Party. He is also a minister within the Ministry of Defense, with oversight powers on civil administration and settlements in the West Bank. He is one of the foremost advocates of expanding Israeli settlements and of eventual annexation of that occupied territory to Israel.

6 The Galilee is the northernmost area of Israel bordered by Lebanon to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and the Jordan Rift Valley to the east. The Negev is the southernmost area of Israel, an arid and semi-arid desert region, covering more than half of the country's total land area (roughly 12,000 square kilometers); it stretches from Beersheba—its largest city and capital—in the north down to Eilat on the Red Sea coast.

7 This is a reference to the grotesque Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

8 The Democrats is a liberal Zionist party in Israel. According to recent opinion polls, it is currently rated fourth in the country's upcoming elections, with about 11 percent support among eligible voters. Together (Beyachad), a centrist-right political alliance founded in April 2026 by former prime ministers Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, is rated third with 12 percent support.

The Humanitarian Impact of the U.S. Embargo on Cuba

BY ARIELA RUIZ CARO

September 17, 2026—Behind the media fanfare surrounding the unusual inauguration ceremony of far-right politician Abelardo de la Espriella as president of Colombia at the Arena Auditorium of the University of Santiago de Cali, the devastating report by independent experts and rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Council on the gravity of the situation in Cuba went unnoticed. On the eve of De la Espriella's inauguration, which adds another link to the geopolitical web that Washington envisions as the “Shield of the Americas,” the experts described the recent measures against the island as an attempt to undermine the constitutional order of a sovereign state through threats and coercion, and urged the international community and civil society to act swiftly to prevent a “silent Gaza” from unfolding,

citing a phrase used by a delegation of four Democratic members of the U.S. Congress following their visit to Cuba.

The report notes that the energy sector, transportation, irrigation, and basic services are failing simultaneously, disproportionately affecting women, children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups, including farmers in the rural economy. They warned that food must never be used as a tool of political pressure, as measures that deliberately deprive a population of the means to survive violate the most basic guarantees of the right to life and undermine the very core of human dignity.

Regarding the pathetic report presented by Secretary of State Marco Rubio on July 20, titled “Cuba: The Capital of 21st-Century Communism,” which describes the island as a multifaceted threat to U.S. national security

and hemispheric stability, the U.N. group criticizes the failure of U.S. authorities to produce concrete evidence to assert that Cuba supports terrorism or subversive activities while accusing Havana of waging an unconventional war against the U.S. through political infiltration, high-level cyberespionage, and covert funding of radical left-wing movements within U.S. borders. On January 29, a national emergency decree issued by the Trump administration declared Cuba an “unusual and extraordinary threat to national security and foreign policy,” and prohibited the supply of oil to the island under penalty of imposing tariffs on those who did so. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez deemed the “threat to national security” a fabricated and unfounded pretext intended solely to justify the severe energy

blockade and collective punishment of the Cuban people, and to build a legal framework in the eyes of public opinion for a potential military aggression.

“I can’t breathe”

The economic embargo imposed by the United States evokes the image of police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis in 2020, pressing his knee against George Floyd’s neck while Floyd—handcuffed and face down—told him he couldn’t breathe until he stopped breathing, sparking massive protests by the Black Lives Matter movement. The U.S. government argues that the victim—in this case, Cuba—“can breathe” because, legally, the blockade includes humanitarian exceptions. However, the reality is that the weight of the legal framework of sanctions cuts off any supply of oxygen.

The U.S. regulatory framework includes humanitarian exceptions for trade with Cuba, but in practice, they don’t prevent the humanitarian crisis. The law prohibits Cuba from purchasing food from the United States using bank credit, so everything must be paid for in advance and in cash. Since Cuba is included on the U.S. list of State Sponsors of Terrorism (along with Iran, North Korea, and Syria), the vast majority of international banks freeze or

refuse to transfer money to the island for fear of being fined by Washington.

The embargo also stipulates that any foreign commercial vessel that calls at a Cuban port is prohibited from entering U.S. ports for the following 180 days. Since the United States is the largest cargo market in the region, almost no major international shipping company agrees to transport food or medicine to Cuba because the logistical penalties would ruin their main routes.

The healthcare sector is the clearest example of how humanitarian exceptions fail in practice. The blockade on oil supplies since January has caused massive blackouts and chronic power outages. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, recently warned that the shortage of diesel and electricity directly disrupts the vaccine cold chain, renders operating rooms inoperable, and paralyzes ambulance transport, leading to the preventable loss of human lives. Official figures from the island report that more than 100,000 surgeries have been put on hold or are on a waiting list due to a lack of basic surgical supplies (including for thousands of cancer patients and children).

The state-owned biotechnology group BioCubaFarma has warned that it is unable to guarantee the supply of

nearly 300 essential medications because the financial blockade prevents it from purchasing chemical raw materials from international suppliers. If a medication or piece of medical equipment contains more than ten percent of components or patents originating in the United States, Cuba cannot purchase it directly. It must seek alternatives in distant markets such as China, India, or Europe, thereby increasing transportation costs. Furthermore, due to the 180-day ban on merchant ships, dozens of containers carrying international humanitarian aid donations end up stranded for months at customs and ports in third countries.

Tightening the noose

Amid tensions with the United States, the Cuban government approved, in mid-June, 176 measures aimed at making its economic and social model more flexible, expanding the role of the private sector, and opening new avenues for foreign investment. These include measures promoting the opening up of the fuel and renewable energy sectors to private enterprise, the creation of private companies with no limit on the number of employees, the sale of state-owned real estate, and authorization for citizens to open bank accounts in foreign currency. While these measures do not signify the definitive end of the planned economy, they mark the most drastic shift toward a free market since the triumph of the 1959 revolution.

Similar to the market liberalization and absolute political control exercised by the Communist Party in some Asian countries, the Cuban government says it will maintain the socialist model, defining the measures as an “update” rather than a transition to capitalism. The Cuban president has stated that the official objective is to save the regime from the current energy and financial collapse, not to dismantle it.

Donald Trump and Marco Rubio claim the reforms do not represent a



Action in Solidarity with the people of Cuba, June 2026.

genuine economic opening, but rather a maneuver to alleviate international pressure without relinquishing political control so they will continue to escalate the economic stranglehold to set Cuba on an irreversible path toward radical regime change before the end of the year, as reported by the *New York Times* and *Axios*. They have also revealed that Washington is exploring which figures within the island's inner circle or forces could form part of an alternative leadership if the current model collapses definitively due to a lack of energy and fuel.

Marco Rubio has explicitly stated that the U.S. plan consists of a campaign of constant maximum pressure: "Every time they create a new mechanism in which they try to get out of the noose, we just close it off." To neutralize the impact of Cuba's economic package, Washington has expanded its sanctions to immediately block new financial entities and institutions such as the Banco Financiero Internacional—a publicly traded company with entirely Cuban capital founded in 1984 and responsible for channeling monetary and credit operations in foreign currencies, which is key to the new plan for generating foreign exchange. President Díaz-Canel has compared the U.S. energy blockade to the colonial tactics of "reconcentration" from the 19th century, reaffirming that the country will persist in its reforms alongside alternative partners such as China and Vietnam so as not to yield to Washington's demands.

The sound of silence

Against this backdrop, on July 7, Cuba requested a special session of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss the immediate impact of the new energy restrictions imposed by the Trump administration. The proposal was approved with 136 countries voting in favor, strong opposition from the United States—along with eight other countries, including Argentina, Paraguay, and

Costa Rica—30 abstentions (Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago), and two absent nations: Antigua and Barbuda¹, and Guyana.

The U.S. delegation had notified several diplomatic missions that Washington would record and analyze in detail the votes and speeches of every nation supporting Cuba's initiative to open the plenary session, suggesting that this would have negative consequences for bilateral relations with the White House. Information about U.S. diplomatic pressure came to light through a secret cable signed by Marco Rubio on July 1, which was leaked to the press, published by Peter Kornbluh in *The Nation*, and publicly denounced by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez. According to the leaked text, the U.S. strategy classified countries to provide specific guidelines to its embassies as follows:

1. Close allies: Demand that they "deliver speeches rebuking Cuba for its adherence to a thoroughly discredited economic theory, its gross incompetence, and its widespread corruption."
2. Non-aligned countries: Urge them to maintain absolute silence and refrain from issuing statements
3. Cuba's traditional partners: Warn them that "the United States will be listening very closely" to each of their speeches, and that it "will try to prevent the use of arguments that could create tensions in our bilateral relations."

Despite these efforts, the U.S. argument for keeping the Cuban issue strictly within a bilateral framework failed, as the vast majority of representatives from the international community considered that the extraterritorial scope of the oil and institutional embargo constituted a global emergency. Cuba suc-

ceeded in demonstrating that the economic stranglehold imposed on it can be suffocating, but the international political isolation with which the United States attempts to isolate it still has cracks. The "maximum pressure" campaign led by Marco Rubio has fragmented the Latin American vote, exposing the deep diplomatic rift in the region. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) cannot even issue a joint statement demanding basic respect for international law and putting an end to the economic stranglehold on the island.

While it is true that economic and political changes are needed in Cuba, something its leadership is well aware of, the sanctions imposed by the United States on the island have serious humanitarian consequences, as documented in the August 6, 2026, UN Human Rights Council. The report also notes that the United States' unilateral and illegal coercive measures against Cuba contravene Article 2 of the United Nations Charter; that these measures are part of a broader strategy of regime change; that all measures imposed against the country must be revoked; and that the Security Council and the General Assembly must urgently address these threats as a matter of international peace and security.

Ariela Ruiz Caro is an economist from Humboldt University of Berlin and holds a master's degree in Economic Integration Processes from the University of Buenos Aires. She is an analyst of the Americas Program for the Andean/Southern Cone region.

—CounterPunch, September 17, 2026

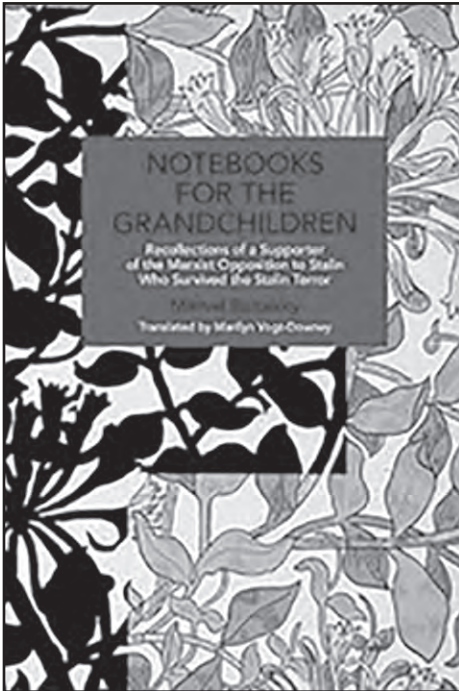
<https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/09/17/the-humanitarian-impact-of-the-us-embargo-on-cuba/>

¹ Antigua and Barbuda is an independent nation of islands in the Caribbean located in the Leeward Islands of the Lesser Antilles.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antigua>

Remaining True to Socialism

BY PAUL LE BLANC



Notebooks for the Grandchildren
 Recollections of a Supporter of the Marxist
 Opposition to Stalin Who Survived the Stalin Terror.
 By Mikhail Baitalsky
 Haymarket Books, 2026

Here is a gift for all who care about the human spirit, freedom, democracy and socialism: a volume of first-person, first-hand recollections about how something that seemed so extraordinarily promising—the 1917 Russian Revolution—took a tragically dark turn, and how some people sought to understand and push against such a fateful and terrible development.

Mikhail Baitalsky (1903-1978), whose occupations included “poet, journalist, mechanic,” had from his early teen-age years to his death, lived as a dedicated Communist. His life-activity included contributing to the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and—amid an evolving and often murderous bureaucratic dictatorship—to experiencing and surviving

repression and years in forced labor camps (the notorious gulag). During his final decades, he sought to understand, describe and explain the meaning of all this for the benefit of future generations. He was forced to do this surreptitiously in the still-repressive atmosphere of the latter-day Soviet Union. In the December 1986 issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, his English-language translator explained:

“In early 1977, we received a copy of the *samizdat* memoirs of Mikhail Baitalsky, who, in the early 1920s in the Ukrainian Republic of the Soviet Union, had become a supporter of the Left Opposition. Baitalsky was arrested three times during the Stalin era and served two terms in the notorious Vorkuta forced labor camp. He was released from his second term in 1955 during the liberalization following Stalin’s death. In 1958 he began writing about his experiences. This project took him 12 years to complete and ended up in the form of nine “notebooks” totaling over 450 pages in length. He called them *Notebooks for the Grandchildren*, and it is one of the most stunning documents to have emerged from the post-Stalin period.”¹

Marilyn Vogt-Downey’s conscientious and elegant English-language translation of this remarkable book had its origins in the 1980s, as a several-year serialization in a small revolutionary socialist journal produced by an expelled fragment (the Fourth Internationalist Tendency) of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. In 1996, this completed translation was published as a book by Humanities Press. For the most part, it was ignored and had little impact. Now it is available in a revised translation—complete with glossaries,

notes, chronologies, maps, photographs and other supporting materials—from the Historical Materialism Book Series, published by Brill in hard-cover, and in a less expensive paperback by Haymarket Books.

This volume is in some ways more substantial than many of the other classic “insider” accounts of the Stalinist terror and repression. University professor Eugenia Ginzburg’s illuminating and moving two-volume *Journey into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind* (made into an excellent 2009 motion picture, with a stunning portrayal by Emily Watson) is very much worth engaging with. So is the clear and informative survey *Nothing But the Truth* (also published under the title *Shipwreck of a Generation*), by a founder and leader of the Palestinian Communist Party also active in the Communist International, Joseph Berger.² The fact that, like Baitalsky, Ginzburg and Berger were dedicated Communists (although in their cases never affiliated with the Left Opposition) provide their accounts with rich sensibilities.

Baitalsky gives serious attention to Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s monumental three-volume *Gulag Archipelago*—which he sees as a powerful achievement seriously marred by clear traces of antisemitism and by an overly tolerant attitude toward Nazi collaborator, former Red Army General Andry Vlasov. (“To surrender when there is no hope of resisting is permissible,” he argues, “but to take up arms for the enemy is not.”) In addition, there is Solzhenitsyn’s authoritarian Russian nationalism, as well as an unremittingly anti-Communist orientation. For Solzhenitsyn “a Communist is an

unredeemable individual, barely a human at all. To him, a person's moral character is determined by his political convictions: A devoted 'orthodox' Communist is a degenerate, while a devoted Christian is an uplifted soul." Baitalsky notes from his own experience that heroes and scoundrels could be found on all sides of such ideological divides. The gulag experience "revealed and strengthened the good or the bad in everyone."³

The bulk of Baitalsky's memoir—similar to the other memoirs cited here—is taken up with vivid descriptions of the brutal interrogations to which the victims of the terror were subjected and, even more, to the many revealing incidents in the daily, ongoing, years-long experience in the forced labor camps. The horrifically degrading quality of life in the camps is bitterly contrasted with words from one of Stalin's speeches (posted as a sign in the gulag) that "life has become better, life has become joyous." Particularly notable is Baitalsky's substantial description of the 1936–37 militant work stoppage and mass hunger strike by forced laborers, led by Left Oppositionists at the notorious Vorkuta camp, which ultimately led to a systematic and wholesale slaughter of imprisoned Trotskyists. Baitalsky's first notebook opens with the words: "For 30 years now, the memory of the Vorkuta executions has been like an open wound inside me."⁴

Notebooks for the Grandchildren shares with *The Gulag Archipelago* a breadth of vision that encompasses philosophy, psychology, history and historiography, politics, and more in a quest for "the meaning of it all." On that level, it seems to this reviewer, Baitalsky's stands as a far richer account than Solzhenitsyn's of the why and how of the Stalinist terror and gulag.

In the remainder of my exploration of Baitalsky's powerful account, I will focus on distinctive aspects of the text

in which he wrestles with "the meaning of it all."

Revolutionary youth

If one wishes to understand the Soviet experience—including the meaning of Communism and of its Stalinist negation—one must come to grips with what seemed to millions throughout the world to be the great promise of the 1917 revolution.

When Baitalsky was thirteen and fourteen years old, as the Bolshevik insurgency swept through Russia and its empire (which included his native Ukraine), he and many close friends were drawn into the struggle for a socialist future. It was punctuated by hopeful and transformative upheavals of the 1920s that unfolded in the wake of a hard-fought civil war (1918-1921), during which, with many others, he had served as a volunteer in the Red Army.

Running far deeper than their comprehension of Marxist theory, however, was a youthful dedication to genuine democracy—rule by the people.

Baitalsky, with friends and comrades throughout Russia and its borderlands, became part of an organization of Communist youth (ages 14–27): the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League—*Vsesoiuznyi leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodëzh* (popularly known as *Komsomol*). This was an independent network of young activists inspired by and supportive of the Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, led by Vladimir Lenin and like-minded comrades, which in the wake of the 1917 revolution renaming itself the Russian Communist Party and soon became the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The League mushroomed as dozens, hundreds and many thousands of young people formed vibrant clubs throughout what had been the Russian empire, animated by a flourishing of "independent thought and concern about people." Baitalsky recalls in his first notebook: "Our views were not hammered into our brains but were freely derived from our own reflections over our experiences, from our concern over the people's misfortunes and our sense of justice." He adds that "our exhilaration with the ideas of the revolution, our feelings toward Lenin, our hatred for the bourgeoisie—all this came from the depths of our soul." In these early revolutionary years, when it was not clear how things would turn out, "Komsomol membership brought with it no privileges," and "we formulated our views in absolute freedom. Those who did not share them did not join the Komsomol..." He elaborates:

"The Komsomol was a voluntary organization and, therefore did not have lies and hypocrisy at its very roots. It was based on a Communist faith—pure and unsullied—probably much like the faith of the first pre-Christian societies on the shores of the Dead Sea, with their Doctrine of Justice and in their reading of sacred texts many hours each day. In those days, we spent whole evenings in our club without ever being bored..."⁵

These young people were voraciously reading and animatedly discussing a variety of Marxist texts: works by Lenin and other Bolsheviks—particularly *The ABC of Communism* by Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky—as well as writings of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, the early Karl Kautsky and Georgi Plekhanov, Franz Mehring, etc. "The study of Marxism was necessary to every one of us, since it was the torch with which we would light the road for the masses," Baitalsky explains.⁶ But he reflects:

"We quickly and firmly mastered a few popular formulas of Marxism, and for us they took the place

of the entire philosophy: “Being determines consciousness” (the most important and most frequently repeated of our dicta); “the proletariat has nothing to lose but their chains”; “religion is the opiate of the masses”; “bourgeois marriage is prostitution”; “whoever is not with us is against us”. And the more often we used these words, the smoother they became, like coins, and it was no longer possible to make out the ideas minted beneath the hammer and sickle.”

His retrospective conclusion:

“Having become absolutes for me way before I was able to understand the entire doctrine from which they were culled, these formulas closed me off from the doctrine as a whole... I imagined that I already knew it all.”⁷

Running far deeper than their comprehension of Marxist theory, however, was a youthful dedication to genuine democracy—rule by the people. “Democratism is directly related to sincerity in human relations,” Baitalsky tells us. “I speak not about democracy as a social institution but about democratization as an element of social norms.” He goes on to explain:

“The February revolution opened up an era of democratism: meetings, elections, and discussions ... Democratism, having suddenly entered the scene for people who had for centuries been trained to be obedient to higher-ups, frequently expressed itself in distorted ways and led to excesses; it could be crude, cruel, and even unreliable. But we were still young and had not yet grown coarse... We viewed ourselves as people of the future. This consciousness was not clothed with any triumphalism or arrogance. On the contrary, it seemed natural and totally normal. We carried in ourselves democratism as a consciousness of something akin to a mission, an extraordinary mission for the universal equality of all people.”⁸

Baitalsky gives considerable attention to the dynamics of democracy, which he views as central to the socialism that he

and his young comrades were fighting for. Of particular interest is his stress on the importance of opposition. “If there is no opposition,” he warns, “the powers roll along, meeting no resistance, in one direction—toward omnipotence—trampling the very people for whose sake (and with whose blood) power was won.” But he specifies additional reasons that an opposition is essential:

“A party can have its own program, tactics, regulations, emblem, banner, and slogans. However, it can have a theory only under the conditions required of all theories: On the condition that the theory is constantly being tested, analyzed, and, consequently, re-examined.”

He adds:

“Society lives, people think and change: One person shifts from the minority to the majority; another shifts from being satisfied or indifferent to being dissatisfied. Those who are dissatisfied (whether they be called troublemakers, oppositionists, innovators, revisionists, or whatever else) are seeking changes... Society needs those who are dissatisfied.”

He concludes:

“Genuine democracy combines, in addition to rights about electing and recalling officials, a third more important right: the right of the opposition minority at any time to raise a question of confidence in someone elected by the majority.”⁹

Downward slide

Animated by such ideals, Baitalsky proudly joined the Communist Party in 1923 and became a journalist who helped generate and focus attention on the perceptions, criticisms and complaints of “worker correspondents” in the pages of the newspapers and other publications he worked on. “The worker—and peasant—correspondents were the most interesting phenomena of the revolutionary period,” he asserts. “These were not leaders pushed forward FROM THE MASSES but people

who remained with the masses, feeling what the masses felt and more sharply than anyone else perceiving and comprehending any evil.”¹⁰ It should be stressed that this was not a clandestine protest project—it was openly promoted and supported by Russian Communist Party members as part of the effort to advance workers’ power and socialism during the 1920s.

Nor is there anything special that Baitalsky perceives in his own actions and those of his closest comrades. “It is not true that we were all exceptional people for our time: brave, truthful, and unflinching, seeking no rewards,” he insisted. “We fully reflected the spirit that was prevalent at the dawn of the Revolution; and we were not the exception, but the rule: ordinary people of our time.” The idealistic Komsomol and Communist Party activists were fueled by a profoundly optimistic perspective: “With hopes fixed on the future, a feeling of personal participation in the world revolution, and a readiness to share full responsibility for it—and it was just about to happen—this uplifted and fortified us in all matters, even in very ordinary ones.”¹¹

By the mid-1920s, however, with the absence of the anticipated revolutionary expansion beyond Russia and its borderlands, a different mood began to spread in the Soviet Republic, and increasingly made itself felt in Communist ranks:

“A mood of conciliation reigned among the people during those bygone years. The New Economic Policy [an economic retreat advanced by Lenin, which stabilized the economy] was in full bloom. For the first time since 1914, people felt that they had enough to eat. The cities always had meat, not to mention bread. After many years of world and civil war, the village and city alike longed for peace... I lived then in the Donbass [an industrial and mining region in eastern Ukraine] where I worked for a newspaper and read thousands of workers correspondence. The Do-

netsk workers in those years were for the most part seasonal workers—semi-peasantry who came to the mines to work during the winter to supplement their income. The main themes of the letters to the newspaper were the bureaucratism, the inattention to the workers' needs, and the disorder in the mines. From them, one general demand emerged: Put things in order—not to change things or restructure them or come up with innovations, but just to put things in order. Thinking back over this epoch, I think that the sentiment in the Donbass reflected the mood of the entire country in those years among the workers and among the peasantry: We want order and peace!... The so-called Lenin levy, which brought an enormous number of people pouring into the party overnight, brought this mood right into the party with it. We want peace! We don't want more changes! We don't need arguments! Just let us live in peace!"¹²

Yet revolutionary internationalism had been a central element in the Bolshevik orientation of 1917—which Lenin and others had consistently emphasized. A successful transition to socialism in Russia was seen as absolutely dependent on triumphant revolutions in the industrialized capitalist countries that would bring them into the socialist orbit. "When we started the international revolution, we did so not because we were convinced that we could foretell its development," as Lenin and his comrades put it in 1921, "but because a number of circumstances compelled us to start it... It was clear to us that without the support of the international world revolution, the victory of the proletarian revolution [in Russia] was impossible."¹³

The necessity of world revolution was colliding with the growing sense of exhaustion among broad layers of the population. The intensifying pressures to somehow square this circle were latched onto by the very forces associated with the growing abuses that the worker correspondents had been pro-

testing against. The dramatically evolving Soviet bureaucracy was increasingly inclined to justify its existence with a new-found possibility: building socialism in a single country, independently of the fortunes of world revolution. This blended with policies of growing centralized authority in the party and state apparatus, as well as growing inequalities.

Passionate young rebels such as Baitalsky, naturally resistant to what was happening, were drawn in a very different direction. "We followed a simple internal path. Before us stood a choice: democracy or suppression of democracy; the possibility to be sincere or the necessity to lie; the right to have our own opinions or the loss of this right. And we made a choice." Baitalsky and his comrades favored a positive response to the complaints and protests of the workers, "implementation of Lenin's plan for the gradual organization along cooperative lines," and the understanding that "Soviet Russia is the cradle of the world revolution," requiring policies to help advance the global spread of socialist revolutions.¹⁴

This aligned them with the evolving positions of the Left Opposition in the early 1920s and the United Opposition of 1927–28. Baitalsky recalls an early city-wide party meeting in which a popular and influential young veteran of the revolutionary movement, Misha Yugov, delivered an oppositional supplementary report:

"A half-century has passed and I cannot remember a word of his speech. But it is impossible to forget the effect it had. Misha gathered all his inner strength and put it into his speech. It was astounding for its passion, for its brilliance and for its force. If one were to weigh on a scale the development of the attitudes in the hall, it would have been obvious: Each of Misha's words fell like a weight into the pan of the scale. The last word fell, and Misha—red and flushed—left the podium."¹⁵

Such open and critical-minded discussion at Communist Party gatherings—which had been common up until then—was soon eliminated by the Stalin leadership. Leon Trotsky and those who are in complete or partial agreement with the perspectives he advanced (which were essentially those of Lenin's 1917 Bolshevism) would no longer be tolerated in the refashioned Communist movement of the 1930s and beyond.¹⁶

Berger, one of many mainstream Communists caught up in the Stalinist purges initiated in the mid-1930s, recalls meeting an aging anarchist with whom he briefly shared a cell when both were imprisoned. "You communists complain about the repressions," the old man scolded, "but in fact you're only getting what you deserve." Berger recalls the anarchist claimed "it was Lenin and Trotsky who had established one-party rule and thereby 'laid the basis for this mockery of the people in general and people in principle in particular.'" Berger continues: "Although he criticized Trotsky in no uncertain terms as a person who bore much of the guilt for what was happening, the anarchist had many words of praise for him as an outstanding revolutionary figure and compared him favorably with Stalin."¹⁷

Although Stalin presented himself as a far more loyal disciple of Lenin than "the Judas Trotsky," Baitalsky certainly did not see it that way—not only citing Lenin's "testament" criticizing Stalin as untrustworthy and calling for his removal as party General Secretary, but contrasting Lenin's modest and frugal day-to-day mode of functioning, which Baitalsky and many others (including Trotsky) embraced, with new norms encouraged by Stalin. In particular, "we ... stood for equality of wages for a worker and for a secretary of the provincial committee. Nor did we approve of preferential provisioning [in special stores for party 'higher-ups']; we considered party maximum an institution necessary to the interest of the party itself. This was not asceticism. It was a principle."¹⁸

Berger usefully elaborates:

"In the early years of the regime the ascetic tradition of the revolutionaries was maintained. One of its outward manifestations was the "Party maximum"—the ceiling imposed on the earnings of Party members. At first this was very low—an official was paid scarcely more than a manual worker, though certain advantages went with a responsible job. Lenin set the tone by refusing an extra *ko-peck* or an extra slice of bread. Later the ceiling was raised, more money for expenses was allowed and it was possible to earn extra on the side by writing. Some people slipped into bourgeois ways, but this was frowned on as a sign of "degeneration." NEP struck a further blow at the tradition, but as long as Lenin was alive something more than lip service was paid to it. A man might earn 120 rubles a month and use the special shops and restaurants opened for the privileged, but he was still not completely cut off from the rank and file of the Party or from the masses. The change came with Stalin and his high material rewards to his supporters. In preparation for the final struggle with the Opposition, the struggle against privilege was finally given up."¹⁹

Crystallization of "Stalinism"

Baitalsky—while unremittingly critical of Stalin—does not invest him with supernatural powers as the All-Powerful Evil One. His explanations are far more down-to-earth:

"Where did Stalin's immense power come from? The post of General Secretary during Lenin's time was not the post of the main party leader. It was an "organizational" position, and in it Stalin grew. He used this position to select his own people, those who were personally loyal to him. His personal authority in those years was no greater in any way than the authority of the other members of the Politburo. But this he knew: First get the apparatus in place, and from that will come the authority...

"The selection of people he liked logically led the General Secretary

to remove those he didn't like. And the intrigues linked with this resulted in an accumulation of secrets about what was happening "in high places". And in most of these secrets, there was not a grain of ideology; they were secrets typical of a sultan's court. But their number grew and grew, and in time there arose the need to conceal, in addition to the court intrigues, a number of other things: Lenin's letter, an objectionable book, the eyewitness testimony of the participants in October. And finally, by the inexorable logic of events, it becomes necessary to bury the witnesses themselves even deeper.

"Neither concealing the documents nor removing witnesses has clearly defined limits. And what should be done with witnesses to the removal of witnesses? And what should be done with the executioners? How do you silence those who are asking too many questions?

"Having at first been the master and manager of the slippery means of his own choosing, the leader in the end unavoidably became their captive. And what began as a campaign to dispatch into internal exile several hundred of his ideological opponents ultimately led him to dispatch millions to forced labor camps."²⁰

Nor does Baitalsky refuse to consider that perhaps Stalin was sincere in wanting to advance the very same revolutionary cause to which he himself was committed. "Let us believe for a moment that Stalin's aim was party unity. But the methods he used to achieve this were slander, demagoguery, lies, falsification of history, and executions. And all this was on an incredible scale." He goes on to argue that the authority he was given by the party leadership body in 1934—on the eve of the purges—was certainly not to launch such a breath-taking campaign:

"Stalin did not propose that the Seventeenth Party Congress adopt a resolution that 60 percent of its delegates be shot within three years' time. He had proposed a resolution

that was quite different. And it is impossible to imagine that the party congress by unanimous vote would have approved in advance its own execution. Stalin's cause, his practical measures, did not correspond to any resolutions. It was proposed, in fact, to strengthen the party and its leadership, not to kill the majority of its Central Committee. It is not just that vile means undermine high goals. But they also lead to results that are totally different, unforeseen, unwanted, and often opposite what had been intended."²¹

Little of what would soon happen was clear to most people in the Soviet Union of the early 1930s. This placed additional pressure on those resistant to Stalin's policies and attracted to the program of the Left Opposition. This made it possible for Baitalsky—along with many other oppositionists—to give way in the interests of "party unity." He was under the illusion that signing a simple statement renouncing his oppositionist standpoint would end the matter. "And I, fool that I was, consoled myself by thinking that with time I would comprehend the scientific wisdom that the party majority had manifested in rejecting Trotsky's conceptions and adopting Stalin's." But the actual dynamics of the situation soon went in a very different direction. Capitulating oppositionists were soon accused of being insincere: "You did not say everything! Confess more!!" Even when he signed his early statement of renunciation, Baitalsky recalls, "I began to feel my moral inferiority," and his later judgment was: "It would have been better to die."²² Given the necessity of transforming the Communist Party into something that was qualitatively different from what it had been, the repressions inevitably increased, even overtaking more and more comrades who had never been involved in any of the oppositions.

In his discussion of "Trotskyists" in the forced labor camps, Berger notes a clear distinction between those, such as

Baitalsky, who had capitulated and the much smaller group of “purists” who refused to compromise their beliefs and rejected the capitulators. “When I accused the Trotskyists of sectarianism, they said that what mattered was ‘to keep the banner unsullied.’”²³

Yet for many the banner was to become hopelessly sullied. The equation of socialism and “progressive” politics with Stalinism was highlighted in the mid-1940s with the publication in the United States of a popularly written tract, *The Great Conspiracy Against Russia* by Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, that even won endorsement from some prominent political figures who were New Deal liberals, and which was quickly translated into Russian and circulated widely by the Soviet government, including serialization in *Pravda*. One of the book’s central themes—utilizing transcripts from the Moscow trials of the 1930s—is that (as Baitalsky summarizes) Trotsky was “the main inspiration for all the espionage, all the sabotage, all the terror and treason” conducted against the Soviet Union and its peoples. Baitalsky elaborates:

“The story goes that even before the Revolution began, he [Trotsky] had sold himself to German intelligence, as had Krestinsky, Bukharin, Rosengolts, and many, many others. The truth is that all of them, this entire detachment of spies under Trotsky’s command, carried out their espionage work while Lenin was alive, while they were extremely close to, valued, respected, and advanced by him. But the book was written in such a captivating way that this side of the matter could easily escape the notice, not only of the ordinary readers but also of Stalin himself.”

This narrative has recently begun to gain circulation within some left-wing circles.²⁴ It powerfully affects how many understand socialism. Instead of a political and economic order of the people, by the people, for the people, it is seen more simply as a nationalized and planned economy run—in the

name of the people, to be sure—by an elite of benevolent decision-makers. This is how Stalin himself came to define socialism: “Our Soviet society is socialist society, because the private ownership of the factories, works, the land, the banks and the transport system has been abolished and public ownership put in its place.” Control of all this by the Communist Party led by Comrade Stalin took the place of democratic control by the laboring people.²⁵

How October 1917 could give way to Stalinism

There were surely comrades who went along with whatever Stalin wanted for unscrupulous, corrupted and cowardly reasons. But Baitalsky does not argue that Stalin’s base of support among the comrades in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was made up of only such types. He personally knew many who were far better than that, including Yeva, the dedicated Komsomol comrade with whom he fell in love and had two children—and who divorced him once he was denounced, in 1937, as an enemy of the Communist Party.

Reflecting on how she and many others approached matters, he wrote that “the 1920s invested Yeva with a noble love for the people and the party (for her they were one and the same), a devotion to the revolution, and a respect for scientific truth.” But it seemed to him that “almost all Yeva’s shortcomings have their origins in these great virtues of hers.” The meaning of her life became defined through an act of deification: “She could not think of herself outside of the revolution. For her the revolution was totally merged with the party, and she could not think of herself outside the party, which in her heart was always written with capital letters: The Party, One and Only, Sacred and Infallible.”²⁶

An important part of Yeva’s political education had been *The ABC of Communism*, whose authors (Bukharin

and Preobrazhensky) were denounced in the 1930s as enemies of the people, of the revolution, and of the Party. By the late 1930s the primary book for reliable political guidance was *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) Short Course*, composed by a commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but according to historian Roy Medvedev, “with Stalin’s participation and under his leadership.” As Baitalsky explains, “the allegedly scientific *Short Course* was transformed into the gospel, which she accepted without question. While remembering she had also considered *The ABC of Communism* to be the gospel, but that it had turned out to be apocryphal, she was now able to revere the new work with no qualms because it had been approved by the Central Committee of our party.”²⁷

Baitalsky adds:

“If the party sanctioned the execution of yesterday’s leaders as spies and murderers, that meant that they were unquestionably spies and murderers. No further evidence was required for Yeva if it had been a Decision of the Party Majority (which rather soon became a Unanimous Decision).”²⁸

At the same time, he links seemingly individual decisions and inclinations with larger historical patterns. Because Solzhenitsyn has followed “a linear (and therefore ahistorical) method,” the great novelist has “lost his way” in dealing with the sweep of Russian history. Baitalsky insists on a different approach:

“Some see the influence of the ideology of Marxism as responsible for all the unpleasant phenomena in Russia. Others squeeze all the events into a schema of the struggle of the classes. Still others (who seem to me to be closest to the truth) put primary emphasis on the inertia caused by the mentality of servitude that towered over Russia for six to seven centuries: first Mongol rule, then the shackles of serfdom and along with it enslavement to the autocratic regime.”²⁹

We have seen the vibrant quality of Baitalsky's understanding of genuine democracy and its centrality to the socialist vision. Yet "a tradition of democratism is acquired only through broad popular practice, assuming universal equality and democratic rights for all. That did not exist in Russia before 1917." He goes on to pose the question: "How did more than six centuries of subservience, lack of any rights, and silence with short historic minutes of mutinies and rebellions—which always ended with defeats and executions—how do these centuries affect the psychology of a people, their character, their understanding of freedom?" And his substantial, essentially historical materialist, answer adds a new dimension to his analysis:

"The West freed itself from feudalism one-and-a-half centuries earlier than Russia did. It was learning parliamentary government while Russia still lay in shackles, hardly able to move. The Russian working class was formed later in Russia than in the large countries of Europe. Developing out of the peasantry from which it had been torn only yesterday (and some of them were not yet torn from it completely), the new proletariat retained many of the traits of the peasantry. But it could not learn what all the classes of Western society had learned from the bourgeoisie, which in its struggle against the political structures of feudalism developed the fundamental institutions of freedom (what we now disparagingly call bourgeois democracy): elections, the parliamentary system, freedom of speech, open airing of views, freedom of movement, the inviolability of one's place of residence, and other rights of the individual. Russia never had freedoms, bourgeois or otherwise. The people simply never managed to learn what freedom tasted like."³⁰

Leading up to the upheavals of 1917, and through the subsequent fifteen years or so—as Baitalsky shows us—

large sectors of the peoples inhabiting the old Russian empire were swept into a rich variety of freedom struggles and meaningful reforms finally achieved, which gave millions, especially multiple sectors of the oppressed and exploited, such tastes of freedom. This impacted profoundly on workers, peasants, women and youth, oppressed nationalities, artists and intellectuals—not only in Russia and its borderlands, but throughout the world, and this still reverberates down to the present. But he suggests that the revolutionary upheavals of—at most—twenty years or so provided "too little time to create a tradition of freedom" capable of overcoming the effects of subservience that permeated the previous six centuries. "The power of yesterday over today always has an impact on any society."³¹

Relevance for today and tomorrow

Understanding what happened in the course of humanity's "yesterdays"—and especially how and why things went wrong with the great Russian revolutionary "experiment"—can help us as we seek to make our way into the future. This is especially urgent for those engaged in struggles against the deepening oppressions and immense destructiveness central to capitalism, and who are reaching for socialist alternatives.

The reader of this book can expect to engage with splendid writing—often eloquent, sometimes poetic—offering a powerful narrative of discovery and survival, with many insights into social complexities and human dynamics. More than this, he helps to focus our attention on much of the rich experience of the Soviet revolution of 1917 and its aftermath. Inseparable from that are discussions highlighting the meaning of socialism and democracy.

—Links, September 3, 2026

<https://links.org.au/remaining-true-socialism-and-wrestling-its-meaning>

1 Marilyn Vogt-Downey, "Introduction to the Baitalsky Memoirs," Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, No. 36, December 1986, 8; <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/bidom/n36-dec-1986-bom.pdf>.

2 Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1967) and *Within the Whirlwind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982); Joseph Berger, *Nothing But the Truth* (New York: John Day Co., 1971); Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 2023). Maria Joffe, Lev Kopelev, Leopold Trepper, Nadezhda Mandelstam and others have also produced important first-hand accounts.

3 Baitalsky, 20-22, 24, 28, 46, 49.

4 Baitalsky, 56. Additional attention on the Vorkuta struggle and massacre is provided in Solzhenitsyn, but for important details, see: Berger, 96-8; Maria Joffe, *One Long Night* (London: New Park, 1978); and M.B., "Trotskyists at Vorkuta," in George Saunders, ed., *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974).

5 Baitalsky, 13-14.

6 Baitalsky, 107.

7 Baitalsky, 113.

8 Baitalsky, 14.

9 Baitalsky, 29, 31, 33, 34.

10 Baitalsky, 126.

11 Baitalsky, 78, 83.

12 Baitalsky, 37-38.

13 Quoted in Baitalsky, 133-4.

14 Baitalsky, 15, 132-3.

15 Baitalsky, 77.

16 See Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition*, 1923-1929, 3 volumes, edited by Naomi Allen and George Saunders (New York: Pathfinder Press, (1975, 1980, 1981), and Paul Le Blanc, *Leon Trotsky* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015).

17 Berger, 83.

18 Baitalsky, 105.

19 Berger, 89-90.

20 Baitalsky, 142-143.

21 Baitalsky, 129, 130.

22 Baitalsky, 31-2, 147, 165.

23 Berger, 95.

24 Baitalsky, 362-3; Michael Sayers and Albert E. Kahn, *The Great Conspiracy Against Russia* (New York: Boni and Gaer, 1946), available online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015074199681&seq=7>; Paul Le Blanc, "Stalin's Latter-Day Defenders," *New Pol-*

Continued on page 61

Labor Day Lessons

Can the CIO aid union organizing today?

By STEVE EARLY



Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy: Building a Progressive Labor Movement
By Kim Scipes
Cornell, 2026

September 1, 2026—Industrial union building in the 1930s has long been the lodestar for the post-New Deal labor left.

If organized labor in the U.S. could go from historic membership lows in the 1920s to an early 1950s peak union density of nearly one-third of all private sector workers, maybe that great leap forward could be repeated again, sometime in the future?

Other than the public sector worker upsurge of the late 1960s and 1970s—which has propped up (with less success over time) overall unionization rates ever since—there has been little sign yet of the second coming of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in some 21st century form.

Unless a union like my own, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), or the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), or the

International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) was able to neutralize management opposition, using bargaining leverage with a partially unionized employer, there have been few recent private sector organizing breakthroughs on a large scale, certainly not industry wide ones.

Starbucks workers have won hundreds of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections in small retail store units but, so far, have been thwarted in their effort to reach an acceptable national agreement covering thousands of workers. At Amazon, representation votes have been far harder to win; when bargaining rights have been won, union supporters face even longer first contract delays.

In their own struggle for collective bargaining, workers in basic industry in the 1930s also had to overcome past defeats and find new ways of organizing themselves to change the balance of power between themselves and giant corporations. In his new book, *Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy: Building a Progressive Labor Movement* (Cornell), sociology professor Kim Scipes, examines parallel efforts to build two CIO unions in the Midwest—via the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee. (PWOC)

Mixing theory and practice

The author is a long-time labor educator and faculty union member, as well as an academic researcher with many prior publications. He has devoted much of his career to mixing theory and practice and is adept at popularizing his findings and ideas to reach a non-academic audience.

In his detailed case studies, Scipes recounts the key role that rank-and-file activists played in the creation of what became the United Steel Workers of America and United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) respectively.

The book is full of valuable lessons for those hoping to have 21st century success in “developing an inclusive, rank-and-file based unionism guided by democratic decision making,” rather than having full-time officials, far removed from the shop floor, exercise too much bureaucratic control.

Just like Depression-era radicals in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) and Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), activists in present-day networks like the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee (EWOC), co-sponsored by Democratic Socialists of America, have to navigate a labor landscape still overly-dominated by the latter-type of labor organization.

Scipes’ book includes a compelling indictment of the U.S. labor movement’s historic failures to resist racism and, in the case of some unions, their disgraceful record of discriminating against Black workers and even white women as members.

He also provides much evidence that denying workers of color an equal voice in union affairs—where and when that was the case—ended up being self-defeating, because it reinforced the divide-and-conquer strategies of management and hampered efforts to raise working class living standards for all. The result was a steady “weakening of labor’s power” and “white workers getting less themselves than they would have gotten had Blacks and other peoples of color been included as equals...”

Rank and file militancy

Among the book’s many strengths is the author’s understanding that rank-and-file militants can also be “marginalized” and deprived of “appropriate attention” in labor history because both academic researchers and authors of labor leader

biographies have, in the past, focused too much on the role of top officials.

The author highlights the UPWA's exemplary record of developing Black leadership in half of its founding locals "in racist, segregated Chicago" will be very instructive for seekers of greater racial and gender diversity among elected local officers today.

Scipes' discussion of the UPWA's approach to membership education and political action, building alliances with non-labor groups, and fighting racial injustice on the job and in the community has great contemporary relevance and resonance. Modern day organizers face similar challenges to building unity between "white ethnics," African-Americans, and recent immigrants from Latin America, the Middle East, and Haiti.

Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy very much follows in the footsteps of Tony Gilpin's *The Long Deep Grudge*¹, a history of the militant, racially integrated, and internally democratic Farm Equipment Workers, a left-led union similar to the Packinghouse Workers in its heyday.

United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) reform struggle

The evolution of PWOC into a far more democratic and progressive union than the United Steelworkers of America (USWA)—deeply committed to develop-

ing and elevating African-American leadership long ago—will be of particular interest to union reformers now seeking to transform the UFCW.

The book is full of valuable lessons for those hoping to have 21st century success in "developing an inclusive, rank-and-file based unionism guided by democratic decision making,"

That AFL-CIO affiliate, with 1.3 million members, is the conservative amalgamated union that UPWA eventually ended up in, via a series of mergers that much diluted its original organizational heritage and culture.

As Scipes suggests, if more unions today were like the original Packinghouse Workers, they might not have had such a hard time rallying their own members against the clear and present danger of a right-wing, anti-union Republican control of Congress and the White House.

During three presidential election cycles, Donald Trump's electoral col-

lege win in 2016 and popular vote victory two years ago exposed how the decline in union social and political influence and membership density in the rust belt has left too many working-class people overly receptive to MAGA appeals, based on "white supremacy" and immigrant bashing.

The "social justice unionism" that Scipes advocates as a better way forward, now and in the 1930s, definitely proved to be a buffer against fascism during the Great Depression. Readers of *Unions, Race, and Popular Democracy* will find it to be an important contribution to current discussions about how to create more militant, progressive unions through internal restructuring, democratization, and reform—or starting all over again with independent labor organizations outside the AFL-CIO.

Steve Early is a former organizer and international union representative for the Communications Workers of America.

—*Popular Resistance*, September 1, 2026

<https://popularresistance.org/labor-day-lessons-can-cio-best-practices-aid-union-organizing-today/>

...the decline in union social and political influence and membership density in the rust belt has left too many working-class people overly receptive to MAGA appeals...



Workers celebrating a historic victory after voting to join the United Auto Workers (UAW) union at the Volkswagen assembly plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in April 2024.

¹ *The Long Deep Grudge: A Story of Big Capital, Radical Labor, and Class War in the American Heartland*, by Toni Gilpin (Author)

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1642590339?lv=shuf&channelId=500&plpRedirect=mhFallback>

The Judicial Torture of Christa Pike

By JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Capital punishment is the most premeditated of murders. —Albert Camus

October 9, 2026—Christa Pike’s heart was meant to stop beating around 10:00 A.M. on September 30 at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville, Tennessee. It didn’t. Her lungs were meant to stop working a few minutes later. They didn’t. Pike was meant to be dead by 10:15. She wasn’t. Instead, a federal appeals court stayed her execution. The state of Tennessee immediately appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court for the right to kill her.

So, Christa Pike waited, sitting in an austere cell next to the execution room. The hours passed. Pike was consoled by her lawyer and a Buddhist monk. Then this Supreme Court did what it has so often done: vacated the stay without allowing the appeals court to consider the relevant new information before it. Part of the information Pike’s lawyers wanted the court to consider was the fact that Pike was a poor candidate for the method of execution the state wanted to use to put her to death. Her lawyers told the court that she had a blood disorder and that her veins were small, too small perhaps to be accurately punctured by an IV needle or hold an IV catheter. These medical trifles didn’t matter to the court and at 5:45 in the afternoon the Tennessee death machine went back into action, nine hours after the scheduled execution.

Pike was strapped to a gurney and wheeled into the execution chamber. An IV team of negligible experience attempted to insert two catheters in Pike’s arms. The State of Tennessee “execution protocol” states that this should take no more than ten minutes. It took at least an hour in Ms. Pike’s

case. Her left arm was punctured at least seven times. One of the needles was jabbed in so fiercely that it was bent.

Ms. Pike became so agitated by the incompetence of her executioners that she tried to help them successfully puncture her small veins, telling them repeatedly, “Please try up on my shoulder. Higher. Please try here! Please try here!”

At 7:30, an hour and thirty-five minutes after the execution was meant to take place after the Supreme Court lifted the stay, the dark curtains concealing the death chamber parted. Seven journalists and the murder victim’s mother were in a viewing room to watch the execution. For several minutes before the curtains opened, they could hear muffled moaning from the execution room.

When Pike was given the chance to say her last words, she said she wished only love for everyone else, even those who wanted her put to death. “I just want to say that I’m going to leave this world the way I spent most of my life, and that is with love. I’m at peace. I’m ready to go.” And then she began to sing as the poison was pumped into her body, a haunting refrain of “and I love you...”

But those would not be Christa Pike’s last words. The next words people heard her say were: “My arm feels like it’s about to burst open.”

Christa Pike is not an especially sympathetic character. There was no question that she participated in killing the person she was convicted of murdering. It took years before Pike repented for her actions. But none of that



Christa Pike during a court appearance. (Screen capture from court video.)

justifies what the state of Tennessee, with the blessing of the U.S. Supreme Court, did to Christa Pike. Christa Pike is not the same person she was in 1996, when she was 18. She's not the same person she was in 2006.

"I had more than my fair share of trauma growing up, and I realized that so many others have that and didn't commit violent crimes," Pike said. "I don't use that or anything else as an excuse for what I did. There is no excuse for what I did. There are reasons for the way I acted. But nothing excuses the crime and the damage it's caused to so many lives.... I take full responsibility for my actions and regret everything that happened that night. If I could take it all back, I would... I'm not even close to being the same person I was over 25 years ago."

Pike never denied her role in killing 19-year-old Colleen Slemmer, a fellow student at the Job Corps training center at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Pike had become convinced that Slemmer was trying to seduce her boyfriend, Tadarly Shipp, who was 17 at the time and also a student at the Job Corps campus. On the night of January 12, 1995, Pike and Shipp, along with their friend Shadolla Peterson (then 18), went out into the woods to smoke pot. Instead, Shipp and Pike attacked Slemmer, beating her repeatedly and slashing her with a box cutter knife, while Peterson stood lookout. Eventually, they pinned Slemmer to the ground and carved a pentagram on her chest, while she screamed. Then Pike grabbed a piece of asphalt and smashed Slemmer's skull, killing her. Pike reached into Slemmer's head wound and pulled out a piece of her skull, which she put in her pocket. It was later revealed that Shipp had been dabbling in Satanic rituals, and he admitted to carving the pentagram into Slemmer's chest. Pike, meanwhile, showed the piece of Slemmer's skull to her friends. The three assailants were arrested within 36 hours of the murder.

A traumatic childhood

It will come as no surprise that Christa Pike was brutalized as a child. She was born with brain damage, likely caused by her mother's abuse of alcohol while pregnant. As a young child, she suffered from seizures. She struggled in school, had difficulty following directions and had little or no control over her emotions and impulses. Instead of getting her the help she needed, Christa was abused by her own family, beaten, yelled at and repeatedly raped by her grandmother's boyfriend, who forced his penis into her mouth on numerous occasions over a period of years, starting when she was only a toddler. Eventually, her school contacted Christa's parents and informed them they suspected she was being sexually abused. Her parents did nothing. The school didn't intervene and neither did social services. The police weren't called. And the abuse continued.

Most medical doctors refuse to perform lethal injection killings, saying it violates their oath as healers, so executions are often performed by prison staff with no or little medical training.

A few years later, when Christa was 11, she was raped by a man in the neighborhood who pulled her into his trailer. Christa told her mother about the rape. But she refused to believe her. When she contracted an infection from her rapist, Christa told a teacher, who contacted her mother and the police. The man was arrested and ultimately pled guilty to a downgraded charge of assault. No protective order was entered and Christa's rapist continued to live a few blocks away, his presence leaving her feeling haunted and terrified.

The abuse followed Christa home, as a series of her mother's boyfriends inflicted violence and systematic harassment against the distraught young girl. One of the men punched her in the face and forced her to "wrestle" with him. He pinched and twisted her nipples as he rolled her around on the floor. Another man used to viciously beat her with a wooden paddle, which he hung ominously from a hook on the wall outside the door to her room.

Even though Christa Pike suffered from congenital brain damage and PTSD, she still showed promise in school and was considered a bright, if nervous, student with a creative "spark." She scored highly on standardized tests, but like many kids with developmental issues and childhood trauma, she suffered nightmares, depression and insomnia, which often made it difficult for her to perform well in the classroom. As a consequence, she failed seventh grade. She was later diagnosed with both obsessive-compulsive disorder and bipolar disorder, even though neither of those psychological issues was raised by her lawyers at trial.

Still, Christa wanted to make something of herself. She told her teachers and friends she wanted to become a nurse. In an attempt to get her life on a new track, she signed up to attend the Job Corps in Knoxville, Tennessee. She hoped to get the vocational training she needed to support herself and escape the abusive environment she'd lived in for most of her life. Instead, she entered a chaotic and poorly run facility, where violence and harassment were common among other poor, neglected and often abused young people. Many carried knives and box cutters to defend themselves.

Perhaps to seek protection in this new and hostile setting, Christa entered into a romantic relationship with another troubled teen, Tadarly Shipp. Shipp, who was a few months younger than Christa, had his own psychologi-

cal issues. He was possessive, paranoid and prone to sudden eruptions of violence, often directed at Christa, whom he brutally hit and kicked with little or no provocation. Yet, as in many situations of domestic abuse, these acts of violence and intimidation only seemed to draw Christa closer to him. Eventually, she began to worry that he might leave her for Colleen Slemmer. These fears led almost inevitably to the dreadful murder of Slemmon on January 12, 1995.

Pike, Shipp, and Peterson were arrested within three days of the murder. Initially, all three were charged with first-degree murder. Eventually, Peter turned into a witness for the state, pled guilty to reduced charges and walked away with probation. Shipp, who was only 17 at the time of the killing, was tried as an adult and convicted at trial. He was sentenced to life in prison with eligibility for parole. Pike, however, was charged with capital murder and conspiracy to commit murder, essentially a prosecutorial trick to hit the defendant with two charges for the same crime to ensure the longest sentence possible. At trial, the State hyped the Satanic abuse angle, even though there's no evidence Pike had shown any interest in the darker arts. In a superstitious region still reeling from the West Memphis Three¹ case, where three teens were wrongly convicted of multiple murders in 1993, which supposedly involved Satanic rituals. They spent 18 years in prison before being released.

Christa was indigent and relied on public defenders at trial. Her lawyers put on what can only be described as a perfunctory defense at best, declining to put on evidence of Christa's traumatic upbringing, psychological infirmities and her being raped as a pre-teen as mitigating factors. They also failed to argue that an 18-year-old girl was too young to be put to death by any civilized society. In fact, Christa was the youngest woman to face the death

penalty in the last 150 years of the Republic. Even Tennessee, a state with a draconian history of criminal justice, hadn't executed a woman since 1819, when the state hanged an unnamed Black woman. The jury, likely inflamed by the Satanic Ritual allegations, quickly returned with guilty verdicts on both counts and, in the penalty phase of the trial, voted to condemn Christa to death by electrocution.

The sentence proceeds

As Christa Pike lay strapped to the execution gurney with IV tubes in both arms, someone wearing a purple latex glove placed a stone on a ledge in the death chamber, a sign that the lethal drugs, pentobarbital, had begun to flow into her veins. According to the execution plan, Christa's heart should have stopped beating within five minutes. The clock on the wall read 7:41. Several minutes passed. Christa's mouth opened wide, then closed. Her Buddhist spiritual advisor, Mikey Nochel, was escorted out of the room. The curtains closed. At this point, a physician was supposed to declare the condemned prisoner dead. But Christa wasn't dead. Her heart was still beating. She was still breathing. She was making gagging noises.

...as a child Christa had suffered "extraordinarily severe extreme trauma...and experienced more severe adverse events than 99 percent of the U.S. population."

According to Tennessee's execution protocols, if the first dose doesn't kill the prisoner, a second dose is supposed to be administered.

The curtains parted. Christa's Buddhist friend returned. The stone

was once again placed on the ledge by the gloved hand. The execution clock read 8:01. Christa's ragged breathing continued. She made moaning noises and grunting sounds. Her body spasmed and lifted briefly from the death table. Another five minutes passed. The curtains closed again and remained closed. No one appeared to declare the execution over and Christa Pike dead.

At 8:53, the witnesses were ordered to leave the viewing room. Not even the staff in the viewing room knew what had happened.

What had happened was that the execution had failed again. Christa Pike was still breathing. Her heart was still beating. She was unconscious, but still alive.

Christa's lawyer Randy Spivey had been separated from his client before the execution began. He'd been stripped of his cell phone and made to watch the execution in the viewing room. He didn't know what had happened to his client after the state had tried to kill her twice and failed. He had to scramble through several prison corridors to find a phone. It took him seven minutes to reach the other members of his legal team to tell them what he thought had happened and to try to make sure Christa got medical attention. They called the governor's office and got no response. They called the emergency number for the State Supreme Court and got an answering machine. They filed emergency motions and finally got a hearing to ensure that an ambulance was dispatched to give Christa medical treatment.

Shackled

Pike was taken to a Nashville hospital, where she remained in critical condition, unconscious and on a ventilator for several days as her doctors tried to wash the poison from her system. Just to ensure she didn't use this opportunity to escape, Tennessee prison guards handcuffed Pike and shackled to her hospital bed over the objections of her medical team.

The skin around the injection sites in Pike's arms was burnt and blistered, indicating that the prison's execution team had failed after seven attempts to fully puncture one of her veins, allowing the killing poison to leak into her muscle tissue instead of her bloodstream. This is exactly the scenario that her legal team had warned the courts might happen. Christa had small veins, shrunk by a blood disorder. But the courts took no notice, even though what happened to Christa Pike has happened before. Tennessee had botched an execution earlier this year. It's called IV infiltration and has been one of the chief culprits in botched executions, where the condemned prisoner has been inflicted with intense pain and burns by lethal drugs that are improperly administered. One doctor described the sensation of IV infiltration with pentobarbital as feeling like being injected with bleach.

Most medical doctors refuse to perform lethal injection killings, saying it violates their oath as healers, so executions are often performed by prison staff with no or little medical training. How does one train for an execution, in any event? Most drug companies refuse to sell the lethal drugs used in state-sponsored killings to prisons, so the prisons often acquire the drugs on the black market or use doses that have been sitting on the shelves long past their expiration dates.

But none of this seems to deter the new class of hard-ass politicians who treat executions as political thrill kills to boost their poll numbers or to an increasingly malicious Supreme Court that has sanctified the nation's execution industry as a form of "cruel and usual" punishment. At one point, Pike's lawyers had even urged the courts to order that Christa be executed by hanging because they feared an attempt to kill her by lethal injection would go painfully wrong.

Christa Pike rehabilitates herself

Lethal injection has a documented failure rate of at least 7.2 percent, according to an analysis by the Death Penalty Information Center. Out of 1,054 attempted executions by lethal injection in the last 40 years, at least 75 have failed, including the May 2026 attempted execution of Tony Carruthers in Tennessee. The execution team attempted to establish an IV line in Carruthers for more than an hour without success, jabbing him at least a dozen times, as he was strapped to the death gurney "wincing and groaning," as one witness described the scene. They can't say they didn't know that the same bumbling outfit was likely to turn the execution of Christa Pike into an hour-long torture session.

While in the hospital, Pike developed a blood clot in her arm and contracted pneumonia. On the night of October 5th, her defense team was led to believe Pike was brain dead and that life support should be removed. Then she regained consciousness and began speaking the following day. She didn't know where she was or what had happened to her: "Where am I and who are you?" Pike asked. Her attorney, Randy Spivey, said she was "angry and confused about everything." Her doctors say it is too soon to tell if Pike is out of the woods or how much permanent damage the failed attempt to kill her inflicted on her body and brain.

Christa Pike has spent her entire adult life in a maximum-security prison, awaiting the day when the state of Tennessee would haul her into an execution chamber and put her to death. Much of that time she spent in solitary confinement, left alone with her thoughts, knowing there was nothing she could do to change her fate. She could and did express remorse, contrition and responsibility for the wretched act she committed on one mad night of her youth. She could do good

works in prison, including mentoring other inmates and saving the life of a woman in a prison brawl. She could find religion and she did in a serious way. She became a Buddhist and not just for show, because converting to Buddhism in the Scopes-trial state was likely to be seen by many, including those capable of granting clemency in the governor's office and parole board, as the equivalent of declaring yourself a priestess of Baal. No, the rest of Christa Pike's life was reduced to waiting for the state to take what was left of it, again and again.

The Tennessee execution team followed the state's execution protocol. They tried, ineptly, it turns out, to kill Christa Pike twice. She survived. It might be argued that the death warrant has been executed and that to try to kill her again would represent a kind of double jeopardy. This legalistic argument might be more persuasive to the "originalist" members of the Supreme Court, than any humanitarian arguments about cruel and unusual punishment or limited mental capacity, which we know they are immune to hearing.

Even after the horrendous scene in the death chamber, the family of Colleen Slemmons says they feel cheated, that justice hasn't been served. But how much is one person meant to endure? How much pain will ever satisfy the family of victims seeking vengeance for the deaths of their loved ones?

This was the second botched execution in Tennessee this year. The state's prison director has resigned. The state's governor, Bill Lee, has placed a temporary moratorium on new executions in the state. But other politicians want the killing machine to start up again and soon. Senator Marsha Blackburn, the former high school beauty pageant contestant (fourth runner up) now running for governor, is eager to see Christa Pike sent back into the execution chamber and killed. Blackburn suggests that

Christa be strapped to a chair this time and electrocuted. (Speaking of state-sponsored sadism, Pete Hegseth wants to livestream the execution by firing squad of Nidal Hasan, who was convicted of killing 13 people at Fort Hood in the 2009. It's been 90 years since there was a public execution in the U.S. Didn't Paddy Chayesky envision televised executions as the ultimate form of American entertainment?)

Dr. Bethany Brand, a clinical psychologist who evaluated Pike, said that as a child Christa had suffered "extraordinarily severe extreme trauma...and experienced more severe adverse events than 99 percent of the U.S. population." But imagine the kind of trauma she has experienced now, as an adult, not from an alcoholic mother, violent and misogynistic men or rapists, but from the state and the supreme arbiters of justice in the nation.

Christa Pike was released from the hospital on October 10, 2026, and was sent back to prison to await a decision on whether the state would try to execute her a third time.

—CounterPunch, October 9, 2026

<https://www.counterpunch.org/2026/10/09/the-judicial-torture-of-christa-pike/>

1 The West Memphis Three are Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin, and Jessie Misskelley Jr., three men who were wrongfully convicted as teenagers for the 1993 murders of three eight-year-old boys (Steve Branch, Michael Moore, and Christopher Byers) in West Memphis, Arkansas.

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

In Defense of Tehran's Political Prisoners

BY WORLD OUTLOOK EDITORS

September 1, 2026— The August 20, 2026, *Guardian*, a British daily, published an open letter addressed To Iran's political prisoners, trapped "between two blades of a scissors." Signed by Angela Davis, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and other activists and academics, the letter extended solidarity to political prisoners facing repression by Iran's theocratic regime, and, at the same time, expressed opposition to the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. [The letter follows this article.]

The Open Letter stirred a fierce controversy. Many on the left slammed the authors as objectively aligning themselves with U.S. imperialism by criticizing the Iranian regime.

At least four of the letter's initial signers—including Palestinian American scholar Rashid Khalidi—subsequently withdrew their signatures. While Khalidi pulled his support "quietly," a couple of other academics cited a "false equivalency" the letter allegedly draws between Israel and the U.S., on one hand, and Iran's government, on the other.

News analysis

One of the attacks on the Open Letter that has received attention came from Vijay Prashad, a historian and political commentator who is the executive director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and an editor of *LeftWord Books*.

"I feel that this letter at this time plays a politically damaging role," Prashad wrote in an article published on August 24, 2026.

"The central image, two blades of a scissors,¹ is evocative but erroneous," Prashad continued. "It suggests that one of the blades is the Islamic Republic and the other blade is the United States and Israel, with the Iranian people

being cut by the two of them. The error of the scissors is not merely that its blades are unequal. It is that the image makes the aggressor and the attacked appear as parallel sources of the same danger, stripping away the history and hierarchy that connect them. U.S. imperialism is not simply one oppression alongside another. It is the force that has encircled Iran, devastated the region, armed Israel, imposed sanctions upon an entire population, and now brought war to Iranian territory. [The Open] letter places the aggression and its target in the same moral frame."

In an essay published on *Substack*, also on August 24, Farah Mokhtareizadeh, an Iranian American scholar, responded to the attacks on the Open Letter by Prashad and others.

"The dispute is not over whether U.S. imperialism is more powerful than the Islamic Republic," Mokhtareizadeh wrote. "Everyone involved agrees that it is. The dispute is over whether Iranians resisting their own state remain political subjects while that imperial war is underway. A prisoner need not demon-



On one side, you face the domination of the Islamic Republic; on the other, the imperialist forces that republic claims to stand against.

strate that two powers are equivalent before both can form part of her political reality. A Kurdish labor organizer can grasp the global asymmetry between Iran and the U.S. while knowing exactly who controls the lock on her cell. An Iranian socialist can defend the country against imperial assault without handing political representation of Iranian workers to the Islamic Republic. An Iranian woman can oppose Zionism without suspending her struggle against gendered state coercion, and a Baloch activist does not become neutral because neither Washington nor Tehran exhausts his political aspirations.² Asymmetry does not require singularity.”

In this debate, *World-Outlook* stands on the side of the Open Letter in defense of Iranian prisoners.

One could argue that a more direct statement of unconditional opposition to the imperialist war on Iran by the U.S. and Israeli governments would have made the Open Letter stronger. The letter does state, however, that “the U.S. and Israel must end their barbaric wars and brutal sanctions that knowingly devastate our communities.”

Criticism of the Open Letter, on the other hand, has led to inaccurate arguments or outright political adaptation to Iran’s clerical regime.

Lessons from 1937 Sino-Japanese war

For example, in recent Facebook posts, political activist Andy Singh Bains reported favorably the withdrawal of several of the initial signers from the Open Letter. To support his position, Singh Bains quoted a 1937 letter on the Sino-Japanese war by Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky to Mexican artist Diego Rivera.

“We do not and never have put all wars on the same plane,” Trotsky wrote in that letter. “Marx and Engels supported the revolutionary struggle of the Irish against Great Britain, of the Poles against the tsar, even though in

these two nationalist wars the leaders were, for the most part, members of the bourgeoisie and even at times of the feudal aristocracy....

“[Bolshevik leader V.I.] Lenin wrote hundreds of pages demonstrating the primary necessity of distinguishing between imperialist nations and the colonial and semicolonial nations which comprise the great majority of humanity. To speak of ‘revolutionary defeatism’ in general, without distinguishing between exploiter and exploited countries, is to make a miserable caricature of Bolshevism and to put that caricature at the service of the imperialists.”

Singh Bains, however, cited Trotsky selectively and thus inaccurately. In the preceding paragraph of his 1937 letter, Trotsky stated:

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organizer can grasp the
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“I said that the duty of all the workers’ organizations of China was to participate actively and in the front lines of the present war against Japan, without abandoning, for a single moment, their own program and independent activity.”

Trotsky was referring to the war between the Republic of China, ruled by Chiang Kai-shek’s bourgeois nationalist regime at the time, and the Japanese empire. It began as a major military conflict with the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria and escalated into a full-scale war in 1937.

Trotsky continued:

“Japan’s struggle is imperialist and reactionary. China’s struggle is emancipatory and progressive.

“But Chiang Kai-shek? We need have no illusions about Chiang Kai-shek, his party, or the whole ruling class of China, just as Marx and Engels had no illusions about the ruling classes of Ireland and Poland. Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible. It is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels, or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle.”

The Iranian prisoners referred to in the Open Letter are not supporting the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran and the signers of the Open Letter state their opposition to this imperialist assault.

Their position is not equivalent to the one Trotsky argued against in 1937. Today those of us who express support for the prisoners in Iran do not say that who wins in Washington’s war against Iran does not matter. For the Iranian people, defense of their sovereignty is critical to their self-determination and to the fight to end the repression that has resulted in the jailing—and worse—of those the Open Letter addresses.

Moreover, in supporting China against Japan, Trotsky did not prettify the reactionary Chinese leadership in the way many leftists now gloss over the brutality of the Iranian theocracy.

Trotsky said clearly, “Chiang Kai-shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants.” The same is true of today’s Iranian government.

Revolution and counter-revolution in Iran

In its March 7 editorial, “End the Bombing of Iran; No Blood for Oil!” *World-Outlook* stated: “The massive bombing of Iran unleashed by the U.S. and Israeli governments on February 28, 2026, has thrust the Middle East into a regional war.... This is an impe-

rialist war, shaking the Mideast and threatening world peace. It has set back prospects for the Iranian people to eventually rid themselves of the oppressive regime in Tehran.”

Calling for an immediate end to the war and a rapid U.S. military withdrawal from the Middle East, the editorial explained:

“To the dismay of U.S. imperialism, Iran’s oil reserves have been out of its reach since Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was deposed by a revolutionary upsurge of Iranian workers and peasants, as well as students and other youth, in 1979. From that moment, under then U.S. president Jimmy Carter, Iran has been a thorn in Washington’s side.

“During the first years of the Iranian revolution, working people made significant gains. The *shoras*—democratically elected workers’ councils—pressed for workers’ control of production in the factories; peasants seized landed estates and demanded agrarian reform; women fought for and secured new political and economic rights.

“One thing was lacking in Iran, however, that prevented working people from completing their victory by taking power into their own hands. There was no revolutionary party, composed in its majority of workers and peasants, experienced in the struggles of the oppressed and exploited, and enjoying the respect of the masses,’ as [noted in] “Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran: Origins of Clerical Regime”³:

“This allowed the bourgeois forces organized around Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to [eventually] establish a stable capitalist regime.”

“In the fall of 1980, the Iraqi army invaded Iranian territory with the backing of Washington and its allies, who had been thwarted by the outcome of the Iranian revolution a-year-and-a-half earlier. The Khomeini regime’s conduct during that war, which ground on for nearly eight years, played a

major role in the eventual overthrow of the Iranian revolution.

“By 1988, when the war with Iraq ended,’ the article referenced above explained, ‘the clerics running Tehran had consolidated a theocratic regime on the corpse of the 1979 revolution. They have ruled dictatorially ever since.’

“For decades, the regime of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—who succeeded Khomeini after his death in 1989—has been marked by authoritarianism and repression. It set back the Iranian workers movement, already debilitated during the decade of the Iran-Iraq war, and kept it in check by repeatedly jailing and killing thousands of opponents.

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“Another feature of the clerics’ rule has been their vociferous antisemitism, fanning the flames of Jew-hatred in the Middle East with both rhetoric and material aid to bourgeois nationalist forces—such as Hamas or Hezbollah—that claimed to represent or support the Palestinian people’s struggle for self-determination but instead set it back. This hatred of Jews is one of the excuses the U.S. and Israeli governments have consistently used as justification for their actions against Iran.”

Tehran’s “pro-Palestinian” posturing

This brings us to another point.

In his criticism of the Open Letter, Prashad claimed that “despite the crackdown on the Left within Iran in the immediate aftermath of the revolu-

tion and with the formation of the Islamic Republic, the commitment to Palestine remained firm.... No other country in the region has been as committed to the Palestinian freedom movement, and none has paid so high a price for that commitment.”

That “commitment,” however, has been nothing but grandstanding by Iran’s clerical regime.

The Iranian government had been supplying its allies in Gaza—Hamas and Islamic Jihad—with arms and technical know-how for years prior to the gruesome October 7, 2023, Hamas-led assault on Israel. Tehran applauded that attack while saying it played no role in organizing it.

“Iran’s assessment posits that the sole effective avenue for resisting the occupation by the Zionist regime is through armed resistance,” Amir Saeid Iravani, the country’s UN ambassador, told the media in 2024. While he did not address reports in the *New York Times* and other big-business media at the time that Tehran was trying to smuggle weapons to the same groups in the West Bank, Iravani stated: “Palestinian resistance forces possess the capability to manufacture and procure the necessary armaments for their cause.”

As *World-Outlook* pointed out in the column “On the Character of the October 7 Attack by Hamas,” “Facing the violence of oppression and military occupation, the oppressed have the right to defend themselves. But the methods used to fight for freedom need to serve the strategic goals of the struggle. If not, they become a political liability and a self-inflicted obstacle on the road to liberation.”

Defending the right of an oppressed people to make use of armed struggle is not the same thing as advocating taking up arms “as the sole effective avenue” at all times to fight for liberation.

What is needed today is a strategy explained clearly decades ago by Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s former

president who led the decades-long struggle to overthrow the racist apartheid regime in that country.

“Victory in the national liberation struggle,” Mandela explained, “is dependent upon the active and conscious participation of the masses of the oppressed people, determining their own destiny through struggle.”

The Palestinian people have shown they can carry out such a strategy. They did so during the First Intifada.⁴

The course of Iran’s regime, and of Hamas and Hezbollah, are the opposite of that.

Hamas has made it clear its strategy includes suicide bombings and other attacks “that target Israeli civilians coupled with mass martyrdom that sacrifices the lives of thousands of Palestinians—ultimately tens-of-thousands or more—who have not chosen this course or volunteered to give up their lives for it,” *World-Outlook* explained.

Such armed actions, which relegate most Palestinians to the status of helpless bystanders, were tested on October 7, 2023, with catastrophic results for the Palestinian people.

The ruins of Gaza, the more than 73,000 Palestinians killed there by Israel’s genocidal response, and an emboldened ultra-right now firmly entrenched in the Israeli government and working with armed settlers to carry out ethnic cleansing in the West Bank speak volumes to that.

This is a result of the Iranian clerical regime’s “support” for the Palestinian struggle.

Iran’s “axis of resistance” had nothing to do with the Palestinian cause

Khalidi is one Palestinian leader who has made a similar point.

In a December 2024 interview on the Bad Hasbara podcast, Khalidi debunked the myth that Iran’s “axis of resistance”⁵ had anything to do with Palestinian national aspirations.

“There was an axis,” Khalidi said. “It was essentially created by Iran as a deterrent to protect the Iranian regime.... That was what their alliance with Syria was for, that was what their support for Hezbollah was for, that was what their support for Hamas was for, and that’s why Iran supported Assad and the so-called Houthis in Yemen. Each of those actors had a degree of independence, they weren’t Iranian clones or controlled by Iran, but Iran supported them, massively, at a huge cost,” he explained.

“I said that the duty of all the workers’ organizations of China was to participate actively and in the front lines of the present war against Japan, without abandoning, for a single moment, their own program and independent activity.”

The \$30 billion Tehran lent the now deposed Syrian dictator had the same purpose, Khalidi said, adding that Assad’s tyranny was “the worst regime in the Middle East.” The Iranian people would love to get it back, “but they’ll never see that money,” he commented.

Tehran did this to advance “the interests of the regime in Iran,” Khalidi insisted.

“They created deterrents to protect Iran against American hostility and hostility of other regimes in the Middle East. And that had no connection, in my view, no connection to a Palestinian national interest,” he continued. “It wasn’t designed, the so-called axis of resistance, to help liberate Palestine or to help the Lebanese liberate the bits of South

Lebanon that Israel controls along the Mount Herman frontier with Lebanon.... It has nothing to do with the Palestinians.”

During that podcast, Khalidi noted that this was one of his criticisms of the Hamas leadership in Gaza. “They sincerely believed that these countries, and actors such as Hezbollah, would abandon their own self-interest and do what Hamas’ military leadership wanted and launch a big war,” he said.

Khalidi insisted that Palestinian resistance is not contingent upon support from Tehran, nor will it be deterred by Israeli aggression. “Occupation will breed resistance whether Iran exists as a super-power or not,” he said. “The Palestinians seem weaker, but they weren’t strong because of Iran; if they were strong at all, it’s because they stay steadfast on their land, it’s because they resist non-violently and violently, and it’s because they will not tolerate occupation in the long run.”

As to the prospects of the Palestinian movement, Khalidi emphasized the importance of working with Israelis to secure a common future. “You’re not going to eliminate them, you’re not going to expel them; they have no place else to go, they’re staying there,” he said, referring to Jewish people in Israel. “You have to figure out how you’re going to live with them, and that has to color how you deal with them.”

These remarks shed more light on the point that Tehran’s pro-Palestinian rhetoric has been a form of grandstanding. It has been part of the regime’s efforts to prop up its own influence among Iranians—and others—who sympathize with the Palestinian quest for national self-determination.

Despite these attempts to bolster its image, confidence in the government by working people and others has plummeted across Iran over the last decade. Periodic explosions of opposition to economic austerity, social repression, and compulsory military service to provide human fodder for the Iranian regime’s reach across the

Mideast have been clear signs of this.

Popular unrest has included an uprising in 2017-18, a wave of mass protests in 2022-23⁶, and the most recent mass demonstrations that began on December 28, 2025, initially sparked by staggering inflation, particularly in food and fuel. All were met with brutal repression by the clerical regime. Thousands have been killed, many more have been imprisoned, and at least dozens of political prisoners have been already executed.

Even though the Iranian government has been able to mobilize tens-of-thousands of supporters in cities across the country in recent months, patriotically shouting—and for good reason—“Death to America,” its character has not changed. Tehran has continued to repress and jail political opponents while fighting the imperialist war.

Defending the Iranian political prisoners today in no way contradicts unconditional opposition to Washington’s imperialist assault on Iran. To the contrary.

—World Outlook.com, September 1, 2026

<https://world-outlook.com/2026/09/01/should-opponents-of-us-israeli-war-on-iran-set-aside-defense-of-tehrans-political-prisoners/>

1 On June 24, 2025, the day after Israel bombed Evin Prison in Iran, the Iranian labor activist and former political prisoner Keyvan Mohtadi wrote about the people still held inside. His wife, labor organizer Anisha Asadollahi, was among them. Mohtadi titled the piece *Political Prisoners Between the Two Blades of the Scissors*.

2 The Kurds and Baloch are two of several ethnic and religious minorities in Iran that face systemic discrimination, economic marginalization, and severe political repression.

3 “Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran: Origins of Clerical Regime”

<https://world-outlook.com/2026/03/07/revolution-and-counter-revolution-in-iran-origins-of-clerical-regime/>

4 On December 8, 1987, an Israeli army truck in Gaza struck two vehicles carrying Palestinian workers, killing four. Protest demon-

strations and strikes began the next day and quickly spread from Gaza to the West Bank, and then to the rest of Israeli-held Palestine. That was the beginning of the first intifada—a mainly nonviolent and unarmed popular uprising involving hundreds-of-thousands of Palestinian youth and working people demanding democratic rights and self-determination. It involved mass protests during which Palestinians confronted savage attacks by the Israeli military simply by throwing stones. “The intifada was a spontaneous, bottom-up campaign of resistance, born of an accumulation of frustration and initially with no connection to the formal Palestinian political leadership,” said Rashid Khalidi about that magnificent revolt, which lasted for more than eight years, in his book *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*. “The First Intifada was an outstanding example of popular resistance and can be considered the first unmitigated victory for the Palestinians in the long colonial war that began in 1917.”

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5 The “axis of resistance” is a network of proxy armies and political formations across the Mideast that Iran’s clerical regime helps finance and direct. They include Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria, as well as Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and, to a lesser extent, in the West Bank. Prior to the Iranian revolution, U.S. support for the shah’s brutal regime, and Washington’s role in overthrowing the government of the reformer Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, led to deep-going hatred of the U.S. government among the Iranian people. Theocracy’s counterrevolution against the Iranian workers and peasants has tried to falsely cloak itself with that anti-imperialist sentiment and exploit it. It is a common theme in its so-called axis of resistance.

6 The Women, Life, Freedom movement was a protest movement launched in Iran in September 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman who was arrested by the morality police for not wearing her hijab properly.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman,_Life,_Freedom_movement

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itics, Winter, 2026, <https://newpol.org/review/stalins-latter-day-defenders/>, a review of Douglas Greene, *In Stalin’s Shadow: Leon Trotsky and the Legacy of the Moscow Trials* (London: Resistance Books, 2025).

25 “Interview Between J.V. Stalin and Roy Howard, March 1, 1936,” Marxist Internet Archive,

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1936/03/01.htm>.

26 Baitalsky, 108, 110.

27 Baitalsky, 111; Roy Medvedev, *Stalin and the Short Course* (2004), ed. by Tim Davenport (Corvallis, Oregon: 1000 Flowers Publishing, 2026), 26, (Digital Only),

<https://archive.org/details/04-medvedev-stalin-and-the-short-course/page/26/mode/2up>.

Also see: David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov, eds., *Stalin’s Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism: A Popular Explanation of the Program of the Communist Party of Russia* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922),

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1920/abc/ABC-of-Communism.pdf>.

28 Baitalsky, 108.

29 Baitalsky, 42, 43.

30 Baitalsky, 39, 44-45.

31 Baitalsky, 39.

To Iran's Political Prisoners, Trapped "Between Two Blades of a Scissors"

Open letter

August marks the anniversary of the 1988 mass executions in Iran, a horror that echoes in the country's current surge in death sentences. It also marks the August 19 anniversary of the UK- and U.S.-orchestrated coup against the prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953. Amid the current, indiscriminate waves of U.S.-Israeli military assaults against Iran, this letter of solidarity denounces the repression of the Iranian people and their political prisoners by forces both at home and abroad.

To our fellow activists, students, thinkers, workers, artists, and other prisoners of conscience held behind the walls of all detention centers across Iran:

We write to you from a place of deep solidarity, our hearts heavy with the knowledge of the struggle you face within Iran's prisons: the torture, the systematic neglect, the enforced silence, and the brutal reality of sham trials and executions. As former and current political prisoners, activists, and scholars committed to the global project of

abolition, anti-authoritarianism and anti-imperialism, we see you across the distances of geography and the silence of censorship and internet blackouts. And we stand in solidarity with you, as you are at the intersection of two sources of oppression.

Whether it is a border wall or a prison gate, the goal is the same: to silence people through fear, domination, and isolation.

On one side, you face the Islamic Republic that, from its inception, enforced absolute social and political control based on an exclusionary ideology. It is a system that claims to counter imperial power while using its very logic of domination and systems of carcerality, torture and execution. On

the other side, you face the aggression and violence of the very imperialist and Zionist forces the Islamic Republic purports to stand against. The U.S. and Israel instigate brutal wars, destroy civilian infrastructure, kill innocent schoolgirls, and treat you as collateral damage in their pursuit of regional dominance. We remember the horror of June 23, 2025, when Israel struck the Evin prison complex, flattening its hospital ward, transgender section, and visitor center. You best exposed this dual oppression when you voiced that you "feel stuck between the two blades of a scissors, the evil regime that imprisons and tortures [you] and a foreign force dropping bombs on [your] heads in the name of freedom."

In the past year, we witnessed both blades of the scissor sharpen. We see the arbitrary arrests and the horrific wave of state executions. We see the deepening criminalization of the working class and unemployed, the targeting of Kurds, Arabs, and Baloch, and the scapegoating of Afghan migrants: all desperate attempts to kill the spirit of people they cannot contain. This is the logic of carceral states everywhere: when they fail to address the crises people face, they simply attempt to criminalize or disappear the people themselves.

We see the same logic of domination when Israel uses "administrative detention" to hold Palestinian political prisoners for years without charge. We see it when Israeli authorities celebrate a new law that allows them to execute the Palestinian political prisoners they cannot dominate. We see it in the ICE detention centers where the U.S. government imprisons our people in the pursuit of a political agenda of racist exclusion or detains our political activists for daring to speak against the U.S.-backed Israeli genocide. We see it in the history of the U.S. targeting freedom



On one side, you face the domination of the Islamic Republic; on the other, the imperialist forces that republic claims to stand against.

fighters, particularly Black, Indigenous, Puerto Rican and other anticolonial organizers, locking them away for decades to crush movements for national liberation and sovereignty. And we see the connections between these carceral systems sharing intelligence and governance techniques, such as when the USP Marion prison in Illinois became a blueprint for prisons built in Iran and Israel in the 1960s. Whether it is a border wall or a prison gate, the goal is the same: to silence people through fear, domination, and isolation.

Your struggle is as global as our collective dreams of freedom and dignity. We stand with you, and we reject the false binary of imperialism and hollow anti-imperialism. We invite global civil society and anti-imperialist activists and organizations to extend their unconditional support and solidarity to all incarcerated kin fighting for our collective liberation, to build relationships with Iranian political prisoners and uplift their voices, to put pressure on the Islamic Republic by challenging its narrative, and to call upon that government to immediately stop all the executions and free all political prisoners.

The Iranian authorities must stop their inhumane practice of death and incarceration now. And the U.S. and Israel must end their barbaric wars and brutal sanctions that knowingly devastate our communities.

In solidarity and with love,

Alberto Toscano, emeritus professor of critical theory, Goldsmiths, *University of London

Angela Davis, former political prisoner, distinguished professor emerita, *University of California, Santa Cruz

Bernardine Dohrn, retired professor of law, *Northwestern University

Bill Ayers, professor, *College Unbound

Cherríe L Moraga, distinguished professor emerita, University of California, Santa Barbara, Chicana feminist writer, and activist

Dan Berger, professor of comparative ethnic studies, *University of Washington Bothell

Hossam el-Hamalawy, Egyptian socialist, scholar and former political prisoner

Jairus Banaji, historian, research professor, SOAS, *University of London

Jason Stanley, professor of philosophy, *University of Toronto

Judith Butler, distinguished professor in the Graduate School, *University of California, Berkeley

The Iranian authorities must stop their inhumane practice of death and incarceration now. And the U.S. and Israel must end their barbaric wars and brutal sanctions that knowingly devastate our communities.

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, author, From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation, professor of African American studies, *Princeton University

Michael Löwy, emeritus research director of sociology at the* Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Michael Mansfield, human rights and civil liberties Bbarrister

Mumia Abu-Jamal, current political prisoner, educator, journalist and activist

Ricardo Jiménez, social activist, former Puerto Rican political prisoner

Ruha Benjamin, professor of African American studies, *Princeton University

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Graduate Center, *CUNY

Walden F Bello, international adjunct professor of sociology, *State University of New York at Binghamton

Yasin al-Haj Saleh, Syrian writer, political dissident, and former political prisoner in Syria

* Organizations for identification purposes only

** Signatories are sorted alphabetically by first name

—*The Guardian*, August 20, 2026

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/ng-interactive/2026/aug/20/iran-political-prisoners>

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The individuals who so far have been singled out by the government, the Minnesota 15, may now face decades in prison, just like the Michigan 8.

“What is happening to our labor union and other unions across the country is extreme acts of workplace repression by our employer collaborating with the state and the federal government to weaken labor organizing and violate our right to collective action,” Teshome noted.

The major labor unions can no longer keep pretending like workers’ struggles can be separated from Palestine solidarity or from the struggle against ICE and policing. No one should stay neutral on this moving train.

Ways to support the Michigan 8 and Minnesota 15

- Donate to the Michigan 8 legal fund and visit *defend-michigan8.org*
- Donate to the Minnesota 15 legal fund and visit *minnesota15.org*

—*Mondoweiss*, September 10, 2026

<https://mondoweiss.net/2026/09/the-u-s-government-is-going-after-a-michigan-labor-union-over-its-palestine->

U.S. Government Criminalizes Labor Union for Supporting Palestine

BY ADI SALEEM AND YARDEN AZOULAY KATZ

On June 10, 2026, the FBI raided the homes of activists involved in Palestine solidarity activism at the University of Michigan (UM), who are now known as the “Michigan 8.” In a show of force, federal agents in military gear broke through the door of a home in Ypsilanti, MI, to arrest a couple of individuals. That day, the FBI also arrested individuals connected to UM Palestine activism in Illinois and Wisconsin. The Justice Department indicted these activists on wildly exaggerated “conspiracy” charges. They could face decades in prison.

The government is now targeting a pro-Palestinian campus labor union involved in defending the Michigan 8.

Last month, August 2026, the Graduate Employees’ Organization (GEO), which represents over 4,000 UM graduate student workers, was served a subpoena signed by the Justice Department’s attorney on the Michigan 8 case. This came shortly after UM and

a local prosecutor tried—but failed—to bring down GEO’s President using baseless “embezzlement” charges. The August subpoena requests extensive information about GEO, including a list of current and former members, meeting minutes, and financial records, dating back to 2023.

This is a clear criminalization of ordinary labor organizing. It’s also a “fishing expedition” that is meant to help the government’s case against Palestine solidarity activists.

The developments in Michigan closely follow those in Minnesota, where certain anti-ICE organizers (the “Minnesota 15”) were also indicted on “conspiracy” charges in June 2026, and where federal agents had spied on unions and used a subpoena to obtain union financial records.

The federal government understands that our struggles are connected. It’s time all labor unions realize it too and refuse to separate Palestine

solidarity or migrant justice organizing from labor organizing.

Criminalizing a pro-Palestinian labor union by targeting its president

The University of Michigan has been working with the local and federal governments to attack GEO. In recent years, GEO, which is Local 3550 of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has won concessions. In April 2023, it went on the longest strike in the University’s history, which resulted in better pay and healthcare for graduate workers. And while big labor unions have historically been on the side of U.S. imperialism (AFT’s current President Randi Weingarten is a staunch Zionist), some union locals, such as GEO, have embraced Palestine solidarity.

Recognizing this emerging alliance between labor and Palestine solidarity organizing, the University turned to the legal system to criminalize the union. This past summer, they went after GEO’s President, Hiab Teshome, an MD-PhD student at UM.

On June 15, 2026, just five days after the FBI raids on the Michigan 8, Detective Sergeant Ryan Cavanaugh of the University of Michigan Police Department called Teshome on her personal phone to say there was a warrant for her arrest and that she would soon be charged with “embezzlement” and “false pretenses.” According to Teshome, he said he wanted to talk about the logistics of her turning herself in to the police. Cavanaugh is well-known to the campus Palestine solidarity movement: he has pepper-sprayed some protesters in the past, allegedly tackled others, and also attended the September 9, 2026, court hearing for the Michigan 8, where we saw him speaking with the U.S. government attorneys. Organizers, including Teshome, also report that Cavanaugh



The Gaza solidarity encampment at the University of Michigan, which was violently disbanded by UM police in May 2024. Photo by Tahrir Coalition.

has a history of harassing them. In February and April of 2026, Cavanaugh had called Teshome to tell her she was being investigated for “embezzlement,” but without giving specifics. Teshome says she referred Cavanaugh to her lawyer, but he failed to respond to her lawyer’s calls. Instead, he continued to call, text, and email Teshome directly, and even visited her former residence, believing it was her current home.

It turned out that the “embezzlement” charges concerned purchases made by a student group in which Teshome was the designated co-signer. UM claimed the purchases weren’t properly accounted for—yet Teshome did not make these purchases herself and was no longer involved in the group. She was implicated simply by being a co-signer, on paper.

Rather than try to resolve this bureaucratic matter internally with its own students, UM took the unprecedented step of turning to the local county prosecutor, Eli Savit (who calls himself a “progressive prosecutor” and is currently running for Michigan Attorney General). Using the narrative and information provided by Cavanaugh, Savit then pressed felony charges against Teshome for embezzlement and false pretenses.

At Teshome’s arraignment on June 26, 2026, an Ann Arbor judge noted that the University had requested that Teshome be banned from campus as part of the bond conditions. Such a ban would have prevented Teshome from participating in the union’s bargaining with the University. The judge refused that request but instead banned Teshome from the University’s administration building and specifically noted she must stay away from the UM Regents. The Regents, who set the University’s major policies, have been targeted by campus activists with calls to divest from Israel. This bond condition shows that the attack on Teshome was also meant to stifle such divestment campaigns.

In response, many showed solidarity with Teshome. An open letter in support of Teshome was signed by hundreds of individuals and several organizations, including the Harvard Graduate Students Union (HGSU-UAW Local 5118) and the Huron Valley Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Yet conspicuously absent from the signatories was Michigan’s labor union establishment, which did not seem to grasp the political significance of the attack on a union president. This is the same labor establishment that had failed to heed a call by Palestinian trade unions, following October 7, 2023, to disrupt the entities enabling Israel’s genocide in Gaza.

The federal government understands that our struggles are connected. It’s time all labor unions realize it too and refuse to separate Palestine solidarity or migrant justice organizing from labor organizing.

Nonetheless, the grassroots prevailed. On August 6, 2026, activists and community members packed the court for Teshome’s probable cause conference. The judge, Cedric Simpson, dismissed the charges within minutes. The court, Simpson said, “is certainly not getting involved in that.”

Criminalizing the whole union

After the effort to bring down Teshome failed, the next target became the union as a whole.

The federal government served a grand jury subpoena, dated August 6: the day that the charges against Teshome were dismissed by the court. The subpoena—signed by the Justice

Department Attorney Maggie Smith from the Michigan 8 case and by Detroit office FBI agent Kara Phipps—asks for the following information, dating back to January 1, 2023:

1. “Collective bargaining agreements;
2. Constitution and By-laws;
3. *All disbursement records and receipts journals pertaining to union officials;*
4. All union employee personnel records, to include all payroll records, W-2 Forms, W-4 Forms, 1099’s, etc.;
5. All associated membership agreements;
6. *Listing of all active and former union members;*
7. Complete listing of all officers and executive board members, to include position.
8. *All minutes of membership meetings and Executive Board meetings*” [emphasis added].

“The University of Michigan and the federal government are attacking our union and the broader labor and Palestine solidarity movement because we are powerful and because we are challenging the University’s material investments in genocide,” said GEO President Hiab Teshome. GEO’s lawyers are currently attempting to get the subpoena quashed on the grounds that it is too broad in scope and violates the union members’ rights to free speech.

The attacks on this Michigan labor union closely parallel the federal government’s tactics against the anti-ICE movement in Minnesota, following the January 2026 murders of Alex Pretti and Renée Good by ICE agents. As part of their investigation into “domestic terrorist financing,” federal agents used subpoenas to obtain several years’ worth of wire transfers made by the Service Employees International Union, which largely represents healthcare workers.

Continued on page 63

SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

Where to find us:

www.socialistviewpoint.org
info@socialistviewpoint.org

EDITORS

Carole Seligman, Bonnie Weinstein

GRAPHIC & WEB DESIGN

Mykael

BUSINESS MANAGER

Carole Seligman

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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, racism, sexism 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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Lifestyles of War Profiteers

BY BEN FREEMAN

September 24, 2026—For the first time, the Pentagon budget topped \$1 trillion, and private contractors now receive more than half of all the tax dollars flowing to the Pentagon.

Few have profited from this privatization of the U.S. military more than the CEOs of Pentagon contractors.

While these companies often advertise their work as supporting the troops, the fact is that many service members live in appalling housing conditions, while military-industrial contractors' profits soar and their CEOs live in luxury.

The lavish lifestyles of these CEOs is laid bare in the new mockumentary "Lords of War,"¹ co-produced by the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft and *The Intercept*, that lampoons an industry held aloft by hundreds-of-billions of public funds every year.

"Lords of War" connects exorbitant Pentagon spending to the luxury enjoyed by the CEOs of its top contractors. As the film notes, Lockheed Martin is regularly the largest recipient of Pentagon contracts, raking in \$75 billion in revenue in 2025—more than 72 percent of which came from the U.S. government.

As "Lords of War's" *faux* real estate aficionado explains, Lockheed's CEOs have used their \$20-million-plus compensation packages to buy luxury real estate from the D.C. suburbs to the shores of Miami.

Despite its care-free tone, the film highlights very real problems within the military-industrial complex. As research by William Hartung and Stephen Semler for Brown University's Costs of War Project showed, 54 percent of the Pentagon's annual spending now goes to private contractors—up from 41 percent in the 1990s.

The top Pentagon contractors' revenues and stock prices also skyrocketed as they've begun to devour an ever-larger share of the military budget.

They converted their revenue from the military into line items on their own budgets that do nothing to improve U.S. national security: armies of lobbyists that now outnumber all members of Congress by a nearly 2-to-1 margin; billions of dollars in stock buybacks; and, of course, CEO compensation packages on par with those of NFL quarterbacks.

The private firms we're entrusting with U.S. national security are doing more to defend their own share prices than they are to defend the nation.

As the film notes, former Lockheed Martin CEO Marillyn Hewson received \$33.7 million in compensation in 2015, which is more than 150 times as much as the average compensation package for an enlisted service member. While Hewson and other Pentagon contractor CEOs have been buying up mansions, the basic pay of service members has been relatively stagnant for the past 20 years when controlling for inflation.

Worse, the conditions service members have been living in are deteriorating. A 2024 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that two-thirds of service members think their housing is unaffordable. And service members often face "long commutes, leave families behind in other states, and work two jobs to afford housing," according to the GAO report.

A July 2026 Senate investigation, meanwhile, revealed dangerous living conditions at military bases in Georgia, including "reports of lead exposure affecting newborn health, severe mold contamination leading to emergency room visits, flooding in living areas, and more."

Wartime environments have been no better, as evidenced by the deplorable conditions—including food shortages and inoperable plumbing—during the USS Abraham Lincoln's extended deployment near Iran, which ultimately led multiple sailors to attempt to jump overboard.

Unfortunately, it's your tax dollars that are paying for this gaping chasm between the lives of contractor CEOs and the troops.

"Lords of War" is one of the few films about military-industrial complex that you find hilarious, but its subject is no laughing matter. The private firms we're entrusting with U.S. national security are doing more to defend their own share prices than they are to defend the nation. If we keep trusting this broken system to keep us safe, then, ultimately, the joke is on us.

—*The Intercept*, September 24, 2026

<https://theintercept.com/2026/09/24/war-weapons-profits-lockheed-rtx->

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiERu1r4Cio&t=3s>



Screenshot of YouTube movie, "Lords of War."



This Google Earth satellite image shows Israel's total destruction of the Tal as Sultan refugee camp in Rafah, Gaza, Palestine. Read *Apocalyptic Destruction of Gaza* on page 38.



On one side, you face the domination of the Islamic Republic; on the other, the imperialist forces that republic claims to stand against. Read *To Iran's Political Prisoners* on page 62.

On the Front Cover: On October 17, 2026, over 800,000 people came out in a massive protest against dilapidated and underfunded schools and the ever-higher cost of living throughout France but especially in the poorer suburbs. (The sign on the right reads, "The suburbs influence Paris, Paris turns France around.") Read *The Despotism of Capitalism and the Democracy of Socialism* on page 4.



Thousands turned out on March 3, 2026, in Minab, Iran, for the funerals of 165 girls and staff killed in a US bombing raid that obliterated a primary school in Hormozgan province. Mourners condemned the imperialist war. Read *In Defense of Tehran's Political Prisoners* on page 57.



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."