

The Racist Police Murder of George Floyd

Only Revolution Can Bring Justice

By Gordon Barnes

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Amidst the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the United States has been wracked by nationwide protests against racist police brutality and murder. Nightly we hear the helicopters overhead; daily come new images of police violence, repression, curfews, arrests and the threat of martial law.

When talking heads and politicians decry the ongoing protests as having “nothing to do” with getting justice for George Floyd, they seek to defame the countless thousands (myself among them) who are filling the streets day after day in fury and outrage. But this much is true: the protests aren’t only about the racist lynching of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police. They are about the everyday brutalization and violence which is endemic under American capitalism. Black people, as an oppressed race/color-caste – integrated into the U.S. economy but forcibly segregated at the bottom of society – bear and have borne disproportionate levels of the vio-



Thousands of young protesters outside Mission High School in San Francisco, June 3, begin march demanding justice for George Floyd (in portrait), murdered by Minneapolis police.

lence meted out by police forces across the country. This historic truth, when juxtaposed to the combined coronavirus and economic crisis’ disproportionate and horrific toll on black people,¹ has created

¹ Citing a paper from the *Annals of Epidemiology*, NPR (30 May) reports that “while disproportionately black counties account for only 30% of the U.S. population, they were the location of 56% of COVID-19 deaths.”

an explosive situation of social ferment.

Floyd’s murder was the proverbial straw which broke the camel’s back, as it came shortly after the police murder of Breonna Taylor and the racist vigilante killing (by an ex-cop and his son) of Ahmaud Arbery. The murders of Floyd, Taylor and Arbery are new notches in a grim tally of black death at the hands of the capitalist state and racist vigilantes and served

as catalyzing moments for the current rebellion. They are not unique, but rather horrendously routine, with previous waves reaching public attention in 2011, 2014, 2015, while in reality they occur all the time.

That George Floyd repeatedly cried out “I can’t breathe” while Derek Chauvin nonchalantly snuffed out his life is a chilling reminder of Eric Garner’s last words as an NYPD officer strangled him to death in 2014. Then, as now, a massive upsurge of discontent has followed. What is different now is that it occurs against the backdrop of a profound economic crisis triggered by the pandemic. As the contradictions of American society are laid bare for all to see, from the police killings, to the incapacity and inadequacy

of healthcare infrastructure, to capitalism’s anarchy of production, we must ask: Why does this continue to happen, how will it stop, and what does the future hold as these protests develop?

Why is it that, despite the waves of protest and cyclical pledges of “reform,” the police keep murdering black people? The list of their names is endless. As *continued on page 12*

Democrats, Republicans: Parties of Racist Repression

As Protests Rock U.S., Cops Keep Killing

By Maeve

The brutal May 25 killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin set off the biggest sustained protests in the history of this country. Multiracial crowds of demonstrators, largely young but including people of all ages, filled the streets to voice outrage against racist police terror, not only in major urban centers such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, but in small, often conservative towns throughout the country as well. Many participants remarked that they were demonstrating for the first time in their lives. Solidarity protests erupted internationally, with some of the first occurring in Liberia and Nigeria on May 28, soon afterward spreading to over 60 countries on all continents except Antarctica.



We Remember

From left: David McAtee, Sean Monterrosa, Rayshard Brooks.

Many protesters hoped and believed that deeply-felt mass indignation against racism would lead to a fundamental change in the way police operate. But the bitter reality – that racist cop terror derives from the very function of the police in capitalist America – was shown once again. Even against the backdrop of worldwide fury over constant

killings by police and racist vigilantes in the U.S., the repressive forces have continued to murder black people. In some cases people have been killed right in the midst of protests against this deadly scourge.

At one protest after another, demonstrators who came out to demand an end to unrelenting racist violence from the cops were

themselves met with police brutality. Cops and National Guard troops launched tear gas and pepper spray, fired rubber bullets, fired flash-bang grenades and beat protesters with clubs and batons. In some cases, these “non-lethal” means of repression resulted in permanent injury, as in the case of journalist Linda Tirado. In Minneapolis on May 29, a rubber bullet penetrated her goggles, blinding her in one eye. At a July 11 protest in Portland, Oregon, federal officers fired a “less-lethal” projectile at Donovan La Bella’s head, fracturing his face and skull.

As we have noted, Democratic mayors are the bosses of the cops from New York to Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago, Baltimore, Atlanta, Louisville, Albuquerque *continued on page 4*

Protests Denounce Murders of Transgender People in Racist, Capitalist U.S.A.

By Will

As we face a new school year in Fall 2020 amid the surreal realities of a society in crisis, *Revolution* recalls a protest at the City University of New York that has many echoes for us today. In Fall 2015, after a year of Black Lives Matter marches that were sparked by the police murders of Eric Garner and Michael Brown, racist cop terror continued unabated. In a rural Texas jail, lynch-law terror had cut short the life of education worker and activist Sandra Bland in July of that year, bringing a new wave of horror and outrage. Not long thereafter, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs brought students, teachers, workers and activists together to remember Sandra Bland and others of our sisters and brothers – particularly transgender women – who had been targeted by racist murder. At the protest, *Revolution* reported, “carefully made posters showed faces and names of transgender women, mainly African American and Latina, who have been murdered this year, including London Chanel, Taja Gabrielle DeJesus and Ashton O’Hara.”¹

Yet in the racist, capitalist United States of America, as we and millions more are continually reminded with each new name that police terror and murderous bigotry add to the list, “it never stops.” Since Minneapolis cops murdered George Floyd on May 25, mass demonstrations against police terror have swept the U.S. Amid this upsurge, protesters have called attention to the fate of African American and Latino trans people killed at the hands of police, prison guards and reactionary bigots. In New York on June 14, roughly 15,000 gathered outside the Brooklyn Museum for a rally and silent march remembering those lives and highlighting the threat of violence, especially state violence, faced by transgender people in general and black trans people in particular.

As of early August – according to a study tracking documented cases in this hor-



Swiger Photography



Samwel Leopardi



Facebook

From left: Dominique Rem'mie Fells, Jayne Thompson, Layleen Polanco.

rendous death toll – 25 transgender people had been killed in the U.S. so far this year, outpacing last year’s total of 27.² Of those killed in 2019, 91% were black. Moreover, a 2014 report by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs found that transgender people who survived violent attacks were seven times more likely than non-transgender people to also experience police violence when reporting those attacks.

The capitalist dystopia called the United States is a living hell for the oppressed, triply so for black and Latino trans people. Endemic, structural racism is key to how capitalism operates in this country. Added to the deadly mix is backlash and bigotry against anything deemed “threatening” to bourgeois society’s institution of the nuclear family. Emerging from the whole history of class society’s subjugation of women, the nuclear family is central to the ways property is passed down by the ruling class and new generations of workers are brought up to be exploited. Upholding and “defending” the sanctity of this key institution of women’s oppression means demonizing as “unnatural” and dangerous anything outside the rigid boundaries of traditional gender roles.³ For many, being an African American or Latina trans person can mean finding oneself in the crosshairs of racial oppression, the oppression of women and dead-

ly bigotry against transgender people.

In his classic work on building a revolutionary workers party, *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), Russian revolutionary leader V.I. Lenin emphasized that such a party must be a tribune (defender) of all the oppressed, “able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression.” Revolutionary Marxists seek to expose the roots of oppression as part of our struggle to bring the power of the multiracial working class into the fight to uproot all forms of social oppression.

To win that fight, the workers and oppressed will have to take power away from the oppressors and exploiters in a proletarian revolution to open the way for a classless socialist society on a world scale. Unlike reformist leaders and groups that claim “justice” can be achieved by voting Democrat or relying on capitalism’s (in)justice system of cops, courts and jails, the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth emphasizes: *Only revolution can bring justice!*

Rem'mie Fells, Jayne Thompson, Layleen Polanco – We Remember

Every time this sick society steals someone’s life for the supposed “crime” of being transgender, this is an attack on us all – workers and oppressed people everywhere who are subject to the violence and exploitation of the same ruling class that decrees “thou shalt not transgress our gender norms.” Remembering those cut down in this way – together with Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many more – and bringing their names into the marches and protests, we help make the point that they are not nameless, faceless statistics. They were our sisters and brothers with friends, families and aspirations, whose lives were criminally cut short.

Dominique Rem'mie Fells, Jayne Thompson, Layleen Polanco – these are just some of the names we remember today.

27-year-old Rem'mie Fells was a black trans woman; a dancer and artist, remembered as “a social butterfly who was very close to her mother” with “dreams of being a fashion designer” (*Philly Voice*, 12 June). According to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (12 June), “Fells made outfits and wigs for people in her freelance fashion work and also organized the ‘Rock the Runway – A Trans Empowerment Fashion Show’ that took place last year....” She was brutally killed in Philadelphia only a couple of weeks after George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis. Rem'mie Fells’ body was found in the Schuylkill River on June 8, badly beaten with

multiple stab wounds and her legs cut off.

The particularly gruesome nature of her murder underscores the deep-seated prejudices and dangers facing so many who do not conform to bourgeois gender norms today. While talking-head hypocrites give endless speeches to glorify “the land of the free” (sic), and politicians parade for votes today in Pride marches, let us recall that the murder of Rem'mie Fells occurred fifty-one years after Stonewall. That is, more than half a century after the “riot against police” that the big-business media and politicians of both parties denounced – in which Marsha P. Johnson and other courageous African American and Latina trans women were in the forefront of repelling violent police attacks right here in New York City.

On May 9, 33-year-old Jayne Thompson was shot and killed by a state trooper in Orchard Mesa, Colorado. A newly transitioning trans woman, Thompson has been described by her close friend Samwel Leopardi as an “amazing person” who was “thoroughly loved and cared for” (*them*, 19 June). She was frequently harassed and targeted for being transgender and had children from a previous relationship whose mother was not accepting of Thompson’s gender identity, according to Leopardi, who noted the adverse effect this had on her mental health. On the day of her murder, Thompson was found unresponsive outside a local grocery store, where she had remained motionless for hours. State trooper Jason Wade claims that when he arrived on the scene to confront Thompson, she lunged at him with a knife, so he proceeded to shoot her dead.

Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco was a 27-year-old black transgender woman from the New York City area. Polanco was a participant in the local ballroom scene, a member of the House of Xtravaganza, where largely African American and Latino transgender people compete in runway competitions and dance performances. One of her fellow house members described her as “so spunky, so full of life ... and positive, always, never, ever, ever drama” (*The City*, 10 June 2019). In April 2019, Polanco was arrested for an alleged assault and held on \$500 bail on drug and prostitution charges stemming from a 2017 arrest. She was kept in solitary confinement on Rikers Island, where she became suicidal. On 15 May 2019, Polanco was sent to Elmhurst Hospital, where she was confined in the psychiatric prison ward. When she returned to Rikers, she was put back in solitary and left unattended for 47 minutes despite suffering

¹ See “CUNY Internationalist Speakout Against Racist Repression,” *Revolution* No. 12, March 2016. The speakout also featured the reading of a special statement sent to the rally by parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa teachers college students abducted in Mexico.

² See “Violence Against the Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Community in 2020” at hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-trans-and-gender-non-conforming-community-in-2020.

³ See “Gay Rights and Socialist Revolution,” *Revolution* No. 4, September 2007.

Visit the League for the Fourth International/
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No Segregation at Anti-Racist Protests!

At a number of demonstrations that the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth has attended in the past period, liberal organizers have literally tried to *segregate* protesters in line with their notions of hierarchies of oppression. Starkly counterposed to real struggle against oppression, such “privilege theory”-inspired antics are no joke. In the face of the cops, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) and other repressive forces, this expression of guilt-tripping identity politics liberalism can quickly endanger the safety of protesters.

A glaring example of this occurred at a 14 July 2019 protest against an I.C.E. raid carried out the day before in Sunset Park, a largely immigrant and Latino neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. Cop cars continually circled the block where the crowd of over 100 was gathered. Using a public-address system, liberal organizers told the crowd to form two separate groups. They said those who “feel vulnerable” as a result of the previous day’s I.C.E. raid should gather together to form one group. “People with privilege,” organizers instructed, should remain where they were standing and link arms with each other. A kind of aisle was created between them and the group that the organizers’ liberal segregation tactics had identified as being more vulnerable.

Then a cop car pulled up next to the protest; an organizer frantically said something into the PA system. Most of the crowd took off running, while others



Internationalist contingent at June 28 march in NYC.

– confused – stayed behind. (It was later stated that organizers had been incorrectly told that I.C.E. agents had been seen standing near a sanctuary church a couple of blocks away, but it was “only cops” in plainclothes.) Intoning the standard popular-frontist chant of “*el pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” (the people united will never be defeated), the organizers, having grievously *disunited* those who had come out to protest together against immigration raids, then led those who still remained to the church. So in idiotically acting out their “check-your-privilege” theatrics,

they – doubtless despite their intentions – created a situation virtually ideal for cops, I.C.E. and/or anti-immigrant bigots to identify and isolate people. Our comrades refused to participate in this grotesque and dangerous display.

This year, at a June 28 protest called in downtown Manhattan by the Reclaim Pride Coalition, a lead organizer announced that the march, which highlighted the issue of police brutality, would be separated into groups – according to tiers of oppression. They instructed black trans people to go first, followed by black disabled people,

then non-black disabled people, followed by everyone else. Fortunately, the crowd of thousands was already integrated and it stayed that way.

Against the basic understanding that effective struggle against the double and triple oppression of transgender people means *joining forces* with all the oppressed, such calls seek to draw lines of rank and hierarchy separating each sector off from the others. Sometimes this is accompanied by guilt-edged calls for “white allies” to act separately to “protect” the oppressed, rather than working together in a common fight of comrades in struggle. This not only creates the illusion that upon seeing a line of white protesters, cops will thereby refrain from attacking the crowd, but can put a target on some demonstrators who are most vulnerable to repression and in some cases deportation. To defeat vicious and dangerous enemies of the oppressed, what’s needed is *uniting* the exploited and oppressed in struggle against each and every form of oppression, bringing in the power of the multi-racial working class.

So as we pointed out amid these and other episodes, attempts to segregate protests based on identity and “privilege” are a very real danger to the oppressed. In opposing liberal and nationalist attempts to impose segregation at protests, we and other class-struggle militants uphold the most basic interests of the fight against oppression. ■



Internationalist Club at Hunter College held a speakout against racist repression on 2 September 2015, highlighting some of the African American and Latina trans people who had been murdered that year.

from epileptic seizures and being at risk for suicide. Polanco died on 7 June 2019 of an epileptic seizure. Recently released surveillance footage shows guards laughing at her as they approached her cell where she lay unresponsive. They waited about an hour and a half before calling for help.

No Justice in the Capitalist Courts

On June 15, the Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination based on race, religion, sex or national origin, applies to sexual orientation and gender expression. In a 6-to-3 ruling that came as a surprise to some, **August 2020**

given the recent confirmations of reactionary justices Neil M. Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, the former wrote for the majority that “an employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law” (*New York Times*, 16 June).

Marxists defend any actual reform or measure that benefits people oppressed by the capitalist social order. At the same time, given illusions constantly pushed by liberal representatives of that same order, we underline the basic fact that any kind of reliance on the Supreme Court is a recipe for defeat. As the Internationalist Group wrote at the time of Brett Kavanaugh’s 2018 Supreme Court confirmation hearing (see “Ka-

vanaugh Confirmation: You Can’t Fight Supreme Court Reaction with Democrats” in *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018): “From its inception, the Supreme Court of the United States has been a bastion of reaction. It was intended as a check on Congress (a ‘barrier’ to the ‘encroachments and oppressions of the representative body,’ as Alexander Hamilton put it in *Federalist Paper* 78), and thus inherently anti-democratic. “The reality, as we have insisted on issues

ranging from abortion rights to freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the foremost class-war prisoner in the United States, is that *there is no justice in the capitalist courts*. To defend our rights, working people and their allies must mobilize our class power.”

Just as the Supreme Court issued a ruling against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender, it can as easily reverse it. That is in the nature of a body set up by the “Founding Fathers,” when slavery was the law of the land, as one more anti-democratic barrier to the exploited and oppressed.⁴

⁴ See “Slavery and the Constitution” on page 15 of this issue of *Revolution*.

Moreover, just days before the Supreme Court issued its ruling, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services implemented a new rule *removing* discrimination protections for gay, lesbian and transgender people under the Affordable Care Act. “Under the new rule, a transgender person could, for example, be refused care for a checkup at a doctor’s office,” the associate director of HIV policy at Kaiser Family Foundation told National Public Radio (12 June). This is the latest in a string of attacks on the rights of trans people by the Trump administration, from banning transgender people from openly serving in the military to mandating that prisoners be placed in housing units based on their biological sex, effectively sentencing them to continual sexual assault or being beaten or killed. The working class and all defenders of democratic rights must actively oppose discrimination and attacks on transgender people.

You can’t rely on the bourgeois state to protect the rights of the oppressed. Whether Democrat or Republican, the capitalist politicians in control of the state, upholding the core interests of the ruling class, wage attack after brutal attack on the oppressed.

To put an end to this terror requires putting an end to the capitalist system itself, which in the U.S. was built on the backs of slaves and today continually wields racist terror to uphold the class rule of the bourgeoisie. What’s needed is a complete break with Democrats, Republicans and all parties of capital, and the formation of a revolutionary workers party that can lead the multi-ethnic, multiracial working class to power. ■

Cops Killing...

continued from page 1

and one city after another where racist murder by the police is unending – despite the raft of “police reform” schemes carried out over the years. Democratic governors have called out the National Guard in one state after another. NYC’s mayor Bill de Blasio, the Bernie Sanders backer who not long ago was hailed as “progressive” hero, went out of his way to back up the NYPD when cops drove a cruiser into BLM protesters.

Bigot-in-chief Trump sent federal forces against protesters near the White House and launched Operation Legend to send feds into cities as an election ploy. Across the country, repression by official forces of the capitalist state has spurred more attacks by far rightists, and there has been a growing phenomenon of vehicles being driven into protesters.

David McAtee – Sean Monterrosa – Rayshard Brooks

These are three of the people whose lives were stolen even as mass protests against racist police terror continued. Only three of the many. These three were killed by the cops in the space of just 12 days in early June. Let us remember their names.

Racist terror took the life of 53-year-old African American **David McAtee** on June 1, amidst a rampage by police and the National Guard. The place: Louisville, Kentucky, where protests were ongoing since police killed Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old paramedic, in her own home over two months before the murder of George Floyd. As police and National Guard, imposing a racist curfew, moved through the mainly African American West End neighborhood, McAtee was serving food at an outdoor stand that was part of his small barbecue restaurant. Considered a pillar of the community, he was known for his kindness and generosity. One local resident of the area recalled that he “tried to feed everybody. He wouldn’t even charge half of them. He would just feed them so they wouldn’t go hungry” (NBC News, 3 June).

All of a sudden, as shown in video footage, the cops and National Guard just opened fire on people mingling outside McAtee’s restaurant and at a gas station across the street, shooting pepper balls at them. Several rushed inside the restaurant to try to escape the onslaught. David McAtee tried to shelter his young niece, who was almost struck in the head by the incoming munitions, and sought to defend his family, as is his right. The police and National Guard proceeded to fire 18 bullets at him, killing him on the spot.

Sean Monterrosa was a 22-year-old Latino from San Francisco’s Mission District, an up-and-coming rapper, counselor in a community youth program and participant in the Black Lives Matter movement. On June 2, he was murdered by police in nearby Vallejo, a city notorious for its trigger-happy cops. (As of 2014, police shootings there were 38 times the national average [KQED, 20 May 2014].) This is the Bay Area town where last year, police shot Willie McCoy, a 20-year-old black man, while he was sleeping in his car, firing 55 bullets in 3.5 seconds (*The Guardian*, 5 June).

Shortly before his murder, Monterrosa texted his sister a petition demanding justice for George Floyd. During a night of protests in Vallejo, a little past midnight cops pulled up to a Walgreens in response to reports of “looting.” Monterrosa stayed in the pharmacy’s parking lot, dropping to

Elijah McClain (1996-2019)

Walking home from the convenience store with an iced tea in hand can be enough to get you killed in this country – if you’re black. The infamous murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin in 2012 by racist vigilante George Zimmerman made that abundantly clear to anyone willing to see. In the midst of the most banal and routine of errands – purchasing a drink and some candy at the local convenience store in his father’s Sanford, Florida neighborhood – Martin was gunned down. Because he looked “suspicious” to a racist. Because he was a young black man.

Fast forward to 24 August 2019 in Aurora, Colorado. Different date, different state, same racist U.S.A. A young black man named Elijah McClain was listening to music as he walked home from a convenience store after picking up an iced tea for his brother. Someone decided the 23-year-old massage therapist looked “suspicious” and called 911. When police arrived and confronted McClain, one of them placed him in a carotid hold, which is meant to cut off blood flow to the brain. Paramedics arrived 15 minutes later, supposedly to treat him. Instead, they injected McClain (who was 5’6” and weighed 140 lbs.) with ketamine, a powerful sedative often used as an anesthetic and a veterinary tranquilizer. It was double the usual dose. He went into cardiac arrest on his way to the hospital, where he died three days later.

The coroner’s report said McClain’s cause of death was “undetermined,” but noted hemorrhaging in his neck and abrasions on his face, back and legs. The Denver affiliate of ABC (10 November 2019) stated that the report also noted that “an idiosyncratic drug reaction (an unexpected reaction to a drug even at the therapeutic level) cannot be ruled out” and essentially blamed McClain himself for his own murder: “most likely the decedent’s physical exertion contributed to death. It is unclear

his knees with his hands up. One officer fired five shots at Monterrosa with a high-powered rifle, shooting through the windshield of an unmarked police vehicle and hitting him in the back of the head. The cop claims he mistook a hammer in Monterrosa’s pocket for a gun.

Now press coverage reports on an in-depth investigation by the Open Vallejo news organization showing that some of the city’s cops have long engaged in a “badge of honor” ritual, “holding barbecues and bending their badges each time they killed someone in the line of duty.” The investigation began after last year’s police murder of Willie McCoy in a Taco Bell drive-through (*Newsweek*, 30 July).

Rayshard Brooks, a 27-year-old African American man, was killed by police in Atlanta, Georgia on June 12. The father of three daughters and a stepson, Brooks had fallen asleep in his car while at a Wendy’s drive-through.

When Atlanta Police Department cops arrived, they questioned him, administered a sobriety test and then sought to arrest him. Brooks broke free. The cops said he took a taser from them – yet video shows he was running away when they shot him in the back, twice. After shooting him twice



Family photo

Elijah McClain

if the officer’s action contributed as well.”

The three officers involved in McClain’s murder were cleared of wrongdoing – the usual, outrageous outcome in a country where police murder black people with impunity on a near-daily basis.

Elijah McClain was a self-taught violinist and guitarist. He used to play his violin for stray cats and dogs, believing this helped



Andy Cross / Denver Post

Riot police attack violin vigil for Elijah McClain in Aurora, Colorado, June 27.

in the back, one of the cops stood on his shoulders; the other kicked his body as he lay on the ground (NBC News, 18 June).

One of the cops who murdered Rayshard Brooks has now been charged with murder. Yet it would be a terrible illusion to conclude that somehow “justice” is now on the way. Over 1,700 civilians a year have been killed by the police since 2014, over 28,000 since 1 January 2000. As of June 10, this year 889 people had already been murdered by cops.¹ Since 2005, according to an NBC News report (13 March), only 35 cops have been convicted of any crime related to an on-duty fatal shooting. The number who have been convicted of murder: five, and only three have seen those convictions stand.

This is just part of what we mean when we say: only revolution can bring justice.

As we go to press, the constant toll of racist murder and brutality continues. The list of those cut down grows ever-longer, and for many young people the horror is overwhelming. New reports arrive just about every day – such as the events at a Black Lives Matter protest on July 25 in Austin, Texas. There, a Fort Hood army sergeant drove

soothe them. National protests against the May 25 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis cops served as the backdrop to a violin vigil held a little over a month later for McClain at a park in Aurora’s Municipal Center. On June 27, string players from across the U.S. gathered to pay their respects to the young violinist.

They were met with violent police repression – batons, tear gas and pepper spray, participants reported, from police in riot gear who charged the vigil. “It was really a surreal scene.... You looked to the left to see all of us standing there with our hands up and the violinists continuing to play, and you look to your right and see hundreds of cops in riot gear” (*The Cut*, 29 June). For the cops, even playing music to honor the memory of yet another young black man cut down by their racist terror was an unforgivable offense to be drowned out and stifled with racist brutality.

The unbearable story of how Elijah McClain’s short life was brought to an end is one of countless stories of black people being killed simply for living their lives. As we fight to carry through our call – “Only revolution can bring justice” – we will always remember his name. ■

into a crowd of demonstrators, then fatally shot Garrett Foster, a 28-year-old white man who, together with his African American fiancée Whitney Mitchell, a quadruple amputee who was in a wheelchair, frequently participated in the anti-racist protests.

During the historic protests that have swept the United States and other countries over the past period, many have been asking how it is possible that the cops keep killing. The most fundamental answer is that racist police terror comes from the very nature of these repressive forces, the armed fist of the state. The police exist to uphold the property, wealth and power of the ruling class in capitalist America, which emerged on the basis of genocide against Native Americans and the system of chattel slavery; and whose profit-driven social system is based on and continues to deepen enormous inequality. To put an end to racist police terror we have to put an end to that social system: capitalism. The urgency of socialist revolution is clearer every day – helping build the multi-racial, multi-ethnic revolutionary vanguard to lead it is our task.

David McAtee, Sean Monterrosa, Rayshard Brooks, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and so many more: WE REMEMBER. Only revolution can bring justice! ■

Rip Out the Turnstiles – For Free Mass Transit

Cops Off the Trains and Out of the Stations!

The following was distributed as a leaflet by the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth at November 2019 protests against racist police attacks on the NYC subways.

UPDATE: On Friday, 22 November 2019, a second “emergency action” march against NYPD brutality was called, this time in Harlem. Some 1,000 demonstrators took off from the Adam Clayton Powell state office building on 125th Street, surrounded by hundreds of police. The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth chant of “Only revolution can bring justice” was picked up by many in the crowd. Cops frequently blocked streets, forcing the march to turn, and in the end ploughed into demonstrators using their bikes as battering rams. In total, 57 people were arrested as the police besieged the heavily black and Latino march. *The RIY demands that everyone arrested be immediately released, and all charges be dropped!*

Over 1,500 people protested on November 1 in downtown Brooklyn against a wave of racist police brutality in the subways. Protesters marched through the streets and blocked major intersections along Atlantic Avenue and Fulton Street, chanting “being broke is not a crime” and “What’s our mission? Abolition.” The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth joined in. The RIY calls for **cops out of the subways**, and to **rip out the turnstiles** – for **free mass transit**, run by the transit workers rather than the real estate speculators and Democratic Party pols who control the system today, and have been running it into the ground for decades.

The outrage against the armed fist of the state was in response to two widely viewed videos of assaults on black people by police. On October 25 a video emerged showing 19-year-old Adrian Napier sitting on a train, hands up, as passengers scattered to the ends of the car to get out of range of

the cops, whose guns were pointing through the windows from outside the car. Seconds before the doors open, Napier is heard calling out to other passengers to “call my mom,” terrified that these may be his last moments. As the doors open, police storm the car and viciously drag Napier to the ground. Roughly a dozen cops, some with guns still drawn, pile onto the young man and proceed to cuff him. His “crime”? Not having \$2.75 for subway fare.

The next day a second video went viral of a rabid gang of cops punching black youth in the Jay St. Metrotech station, as if in a drunken pub brawl. Lawyers with Brooklyn Defender Services revealed that one of the cops had been involved in a prior arrest in which he tore a one-year-old child from his mother’s arms and brandished a taser against a crowd of outraged onlookers. Two weeks later, yet another video surfaced showing police detaining a woman at the Broadway Junction station for selling churros. The woman was crying as she was taken away in handcuffs and her cart was confiscated.

These wanton attacks occur in the context of a recent spike in fatal shootings by the killer cops of the New York Police Department (NYPD). Six people have been killed by police in the past month and eleven in total since the beginning of the year. (The trigger-happy lawmen even killed two of their own in “friendly” fire.) At the November 1 protest, an Internationalist Group sign declared: “We Remember Allan Feliz, Antonio Williams, Victor Hernandez – Victims of NYPD Terror.” This escalation of police terror is a direct result of so-called “broken windows” policing, championed by former mayors Bloomberg and Giuliani and continued by de Blasio, of massively arresting African American and Latino youth for petty “crimes.”

In response to the video of Napier being manhandled by NYPD thugs, seen by over 3 million viewers, de Blasio defended the cops’ brutal action, saying that someone had identified him “as someone they saw with a gun.” But Napier did not have a gun, so they charged him with fare evasion for jumping the turnstile trying to escape from the pistol-brandishing police gang. He was another black man in the wrong place at the wrong time in the racist U.S.A. As for the woman selling churros, de Blasio declared “she shouldn’t have been there” and that “the officers comported themselves properly” (*New York Times*, 11 November 2019).

The terror on the subways comes months after Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo’s agreement with the Metropolitan Transit Authority and Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio to flood the trains, stations and buses with an additional 500 uniformed cops in a so-called “quality of life” bid to stop “fare beaters.” Are they also targeting high cholesterol from churros?!

This police crackdown is racist to the core – and it is massive. According to nyc.gov, in the three months from April to June of this year, 15,820 summonses were issued for fare evasion; 71% were to African Americans and Latinos, who were also hit with 86% of the 682 arrests in the same period for the same non-crime. Likewise, the recent targeting of subway vendors is especially menacing to Latina women and black youth, some of whom are only children.

Cuomo and the MTA have tried to justify the heavy cop presence by citing an increase in crime and assaults on transit workers. But even the NYPD chief called Cuomo’s bluff, labeling it “a total mischaracterization” (*AM New York*, 31 October 2019). From the beginning, when the plan was announced, de Blasio threw his weight behind it, declaring “the additional officers we’re deploying to the subway system will protect riders, prevent fare evasion and respond in emergencies,” while adding that transit workers “need more protection.” But neither Cuomo nor de Blasio give a damn about worker safety. This is all about racist terror.

While Bloomberg was in office, “broken windows” also meant “stop-and-frisk” – the NYPD practice of racially profiling African American and Latino men for unconstitutional searches. The policy was begun under Giuliani by NYPD commissioner William Bratton, who was then brought back as top cop by de Blasio. The ostensible aim was to “get guns off the street,” but the real purpose of stop-and-frisk was to terrorize the non-white majority of the population. In 2011, the stops peaked at 685,724 (see “Thousands Protest Racist ‘Stop and Frisk,’” *The Internationalist*, Summer 2012). In the 12 years of Bloomberg’s three terms as mayor, there were over 5 million stops, 90% of black and Latino men, the vast majority innocent of any crime.

continued on page 8



Hundreds protesting cop brutality marched through Harlem in the face of an army of police constantly blocking streets and arresting demonstrators.



RIY chants of “Only revolution can bring justice” and “Eric Garner, Michael Brown, shut the whole system down” were picked up by many in the crowd during 22 November 2019 march through Harlem.

For Labor/Black/Immigrant Mobilizations Against Police Killings!

Racist Cop Terror Stalks Connecticut

The following was issued as a Revolutionary Internationalist Youth leaflet in Connecticut in the summer of 2019, following a string of racist police murders against black and Latino youth.

The first half of 2019 has seen a rampage of racist police murder and repression in Connecticut. On April 16, a young black couple, 21-year-old Paul Witherspoon III and 23-year-old Stephanie Washington, were pulled over by two Yale PD and Hamden PD cops in New Haven, who proceeded to unload a barrage of gunfire into their car, wounding Washington. Four days later, on April 20, 18-year-old Anthony Jose “Chulo” Vega Cruz was murdered by police in Wethersfield. After initiating a car chase, the cops intentionally jumped in front of Chulo’s vehicle with guns drawn and shot him in the head twice.

Those who dare speak out against racist police terror have also been the targets of repression. On May 9, on the two-year anniversary of the execution-style murder of 15-year-old Jayson Negron by Bridgeport cops, a rabid mob of police assaulted a memorial being held at the site of Jayson’s killing, arresting eleven protesters and a journalist from Hearst Connecticut Media.

Police terror against black people, Latinos and immigrants is a fundamental feature of capitalist society. The police were founded as slave patrols in the South and strikebreakers in the North, serving the vital interests of the capitalist ruling class. Their function is to enforce the racist, capitalist “law and order” upholding the system of private property and exploitation. *The only way to put an end to cop terror for good is through socialist revolution.* Relying on Democrats, the bosses of the racist killer cops in many major U.S. cities, to bring “justice” for the victims of the capitalist state is a deadly illusion. Instead, the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, youth section of the Internationalist Group/U.S., calls for **labor/black/immigrant mobilizations against cop terror**. As we emphasize in the Internationalist chant in protests against this racist terror: **Only revolution can bring justice!**

Connecticut’s recent spate of police repression is business as usual for departments across the state. On 14 December 2017, police in New Britain shot and murdered 20-year-old Zoe Dowdell in his car, firing over 50 rounds into the vehicle. They continued shooting even after Zoe was clearly dead. The two witnesses to the murder, 18-year-old Noah Young and 15-year-old Caleb Tisdol, passengers in Zoe’s car who were also shot, were subsequently thrown in jail on trumped-up charges. Like in New York City, where Ramsey Orta was put behind bars as retribution for filming the 2014 chokehold murder of Eric Garner by the NYPD, this underscores the thoroughly racist nature of the bourgeois “justice” system. From the municipal police force on up to the Attorney General and Supreme Court, these institutions of the capitalist state exist to defend bourgeois class rule, which is and has always been



Victims of racist police terror. From left: Zoe Dowdell, Jose “Chulo” Vega Cruz, Jayson Negron.

propped up by racist oppression since the origins of this country.

Nationwide attention was drawn to racist police terror in mass protests over the murders of Eric Garner, Freddie Gray and others and the brutal military repression following the Baltimore uprising of 2015 following the police murder of Freddie Gray. Today in Connecticut, police keep close tabs on the mostly black-led protests. Across the country, they guard provocations by fascist organizations, such as the recent “Straight Pride” fascist provocation in Detroit, where openly armed Nazis marched through the Motor City with a police escort. And on the U.S.-Mexico border in New Mexico this April, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) cops collaborated with the fascistic United Constitutional Patriots militia to detain migrants.

Racist police repression against black people and Latinos, fascist provocations against immigrants, gay, lesbian and transgender people, CBP throwing migrant children and families into concentration camps, I.C.E. Gestapo raiding immigrant homes and workplaces – these are attacks against the entire working class. As Trump announces vicious mass raids against undocumented immigrants, the struggle against police repression is intimately linked to the fight against anti-immigrant attacks. What’s needed are massive mobilizations bringing out the **power** of the multiracial working class and oppressed to **STOP deportations, to smash fascist and racist attacks**, and to fight for **full citizenship rights for all immigrants**. As the youth section of the Internationalist Group/U.S., the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth works to win students and youth to this struggle, as part of the fight to **forge a multiracial, multi-ethnic revolutionary workers party** that would lead the fight to overthrow the capitalist system.

The Capitalist State: Machine of Racist Repression

Before video footage of the police murder of “Chulo” Vega Cruz was released in May, police claimed he had tried to run them over with his car. This was disproven by dash cam footage showing the cops on a road rage rampage. In this country, traffic stops are common sites of cop terror, as in

the gruesome case of Sandra Bland, who was the victim of racist lynch “justice” in Texas. In Hartford County, the Hispanic population is well aware of police racism, with cops routinely having their guns drawn when stopping youth in the area. Police chases in Connecticut have killed others as well, like 18-year-old Corbin Cooper, killed in June 2018 when he was a passenger in a car that crashed in Bridgeport. Luis Martinez was another victim, a 17-year-old from Hartford who was killed in a police chase crash.

Outrage over these types of incidents led to the passing of a so-called police accountability and transparency law, SB 380, by the Connecticut state legislature on June 5. This law was written with the participation of state police chiefs as yet another way of assuring that the “reforms” would do nothing. The law requires police departments to release video footage of police shootings within 96 hours of an incident. But the state would still be “investigating” itself – as happens in so many of these situations, including in Jayson Negron’s murder. Experience has repeatedly shown that for the racist *injustice* system, a cop’s word counts far more than camera footage of police murder.

In regard to how police are to deal with moving vehicles, much of SB 380 has to do

with things such as police having to obtain permission from superiors before jumping in front of a moving vehicle during a pursuit. The rest of the bill is dedicated to protecting cops’ access to their firearms following a shooting incident – preventing any penalties after they seek mental health treatment or after they voluntarily surrender their gun for a time. The bill also reinforces racist “gun control” measures aimed against undocumented immigrants, a population already deprived of its most basic democratic rights. Gun control laws, historically created and used to enforce racist repression against black people, must be opposed by all those who understand the racist nature of the capitalist state and the need for working class self-defense.

Various police departments in Connecticut – Fairfield, Westport, Stratford, Trumbull and Norwalk, as well as Southern Connecticut State University – have received national media attention over their collaboration with the I.C.E. Gestapo. Immigrants have been victims of police repression elsewhere in New England. Nelson Fuentes-Lopez and Nolasco Perez, members of the immigrant rights group Cosecha Massachusetts, were arrested by New Hampshire State Police on May 13 and handed over to I.C.E. While both have been released, for now, both are threatened with deportation. I.C.E. is notorious for targeting political activists who defend immigrants’ rights, such as Siham Biyah of Occupy Boston, as well as Ravi Ragbir and Jean Montrevil in New York City. The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth demands: **No Deportations! Let Perez and Fuentes-Lopez Stay!**

You Can’t Fight Trump With the Democrats

Trump’s racist tirade against four black and Latina Democratic congresswomen, one of whom is an immigrant, telling them to “go back” to the “crime infested places from which they came,” is yet another vile *continued on page 8*



Marxist Student Union at 26 January 2019 protest against racist police murder of Zoe Dowdell in New Britain, Connecticut.

Defend International Students! Defeat Attacks Against Immigrants!

UPDATE: It has generally been reported that on July 14 the Trump administration abandoned its attack on international students, in which it ordered that they change universities or face deportation if their course load was fully online. In reality they took only a half-step backward, allowing students presently enrolled to continue their Fall 2020 studies even if they are fully online, while maintaining the ban for new international students.

Statement of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth

NEW YORK CITY, July 7 – On Monday, July 6, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) launched a vicious attack against international students. Students pursuing high-school, higher education and vocational studies through F-1 and M-1 visas now “may ***not*** take a full online course load and remain in the United States.” So decreed the U.S. immigration Gestapo. For these students, the options are limited: 1) if schools and programs have not adopted either an in-person or hybrid method of instruction, they must transfer to a college or university that meets federal regulations; or 2) leave the U.S. or be deported.

*This is the latest in the chain of xenophobic attacks, targeting over one million of our brothers and sisters who are international students. It comes as hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest racist oppression and the police murder of George Floyd and so many others. The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (youth section of the Internationalist Group) says: an attack against one is an attack against us all. **We call for labor/black/immigrant action against racist police and anti-immigrant terror, and to stop this vile attack on international students.***

More than 350,000 international stu-



CUNY Internationalists initiated protests bringing out hundreds of students, immigrant workers, teachers and community activists to stop City University's "war purge" of undocumented students after 9/11.

dents come from China. Over 200,000 from India. And tens of thousands more, respectively, from South Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Mexico and Brazil, among many other countries. We all know that the purpose of measures such as this outright purge against international students is not to “curtail” or “defeat” the coronavirus, whatever the bigots in Washington may claim. The profit-driven, racist capitalist system in the U.S. is incapable of even basic effective measures amid the pandemic. It has continued spreading the virus while seeking to hold off a complete collapse of the medical system by sending sick people back to their homes to infect their families. Putting into effect Trump’s ravings against the “foreign invader,” the new I.C.E. measure means further exportation of the virus even as it surges through one region after another within the U.S.

At the City University of New York (CUNY), there are about 9,000 international students. There are over 40,000 at the University of California. These are our fellow

students and classmates *and we will not stand by and watch them be dragged away.* The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth demands: ***Let them stay! Students, faculty and staff must fight to bring out the power of organized labor to stop the deportations and xenophobic attacks on immigrant students.***

This latest display of sadistic bigotry comes after:

- Hundreds of asylum-seeking migrant children and adolescents were summarily deported to Guatemala and Honduras at the start of the pandemic without being able to plead their case or, in many cases, even speak to social workers. Now over 2,000 unaccompanied children have been sent back, and the Supreme Court has ruled that the U.S. government can deport asylum seekers without formal court proceedings.
- Additionally, faulty coronavirus testing methods, like inconclusive temperature checks, have meant that thousands of coronavirus-positive migrants have been deported, with 351 flights to Latin America and the Caribbean since February (“Exporting the Virus,” *The Intercept*, 26 June). Countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador have been forced to take in tens of thousands of deported immigrants a month.
- Moreover, a 60-day freeze on employment-based visas targeting health-care, education and tech professions, issued in April, has been extended to the end of the year to “reserve 525,000 jobs for American citizens” because, according to the Trump White House proclamation (22 June), immigrant workers supposedly pose “an unusual threat to the employment of American workers.”
- Meanwhile, the Education Department’s \$6 billion emergency relief to students under the CARES Act was granted to citizens and legal residents *only*, as per Education Secretary Betsy DeVos’s orders.
- This came on top of the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from receiving stimulus checks or filing for unemployment. Immigrants are facing a dire situation as their savings (if they have any) are quickly used up on everyday essentials. While living under what

amounts to a police state, the threat of deportation looms.

- Now the end of moratoriums on evictions in New York and other states is set to cause a deluge of evictions, in which immigrants will be among those hit first and hardest.

This horrendous situation is a bipartisan-orchestrated affair. As Nancy Pelosi's House Democrats push for a Senate vote on the HEROES Act, best believe there will again be no relief for the over 11 million undocumented immigrants (and their families), many of whom are deemed "essential workers."

Break with the Democrats – For Socialist Revolution!

After 11 September 2001, the CUNY administration attempted a university-wide “war purge” of undocumented immigrants. As “illegal aliens” they were declared a threat to “national security” by both Republicans and Democrats. How was this purge to be accomplished? *By hiking the tuition of immigrant students*, thus forcing large numbers out. The Internationalist Group initiated protests bringing together hundreds of students, immigrant workers, teachers and community activists to stop this attack and demand “**Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!**” and defeated this despicable act of “patriotism” by the administration.¹

Then when the first iteration of the racist “Muslim ban” was signed in January 2017, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs organized protests outside of Hunter College denouncing the xenophobic targeting of immigrants from majority-Muslim countries. As a result, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs formed the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims. We wrote then, *“It is the responsibility of students, faculty and workers to help defend our brothers and sisters who are being targeted by this racist onslaught”* and not look to the administration or Board of Trustees. This holds true today. We must be prepared to *shut the campuses down* in the event I.C.E. tries to enter the schools or deport any student or employee.

The capitalist ruling class every day attempts to convince us that the enemy resides within a foreign camp. But the enemy is here at home – Wall Street, Washington, Democrats and Republicans alike, the bourgeois parties of the foremost imperialist country in the world. The Democrats pretend to be friends of immigrants, while stabbing them in the back and using them as political pawns. And the Trump administration is seizing on the pandemic to ram through anti-immigrant policies to rival the record of ex-Deporter-in-Chief Barack Obama.

To put an end, once and for all, to raids and deportations, students and workers must break from all illusions in the Democratic Party, and all capitalist parties. Defending immigrants requires real power capable of coming up against the capitalist state – the power of the working class organized in a revolutionary workers party to fight for socialist revolution, the only way to uphold the rights of all the oppressed. ■

¹ See the Internationalist pamphlet, *Defend Immigrant Students - Defeat CUNY's "War Purge"* (December 2001).



CUNY Internationalist Clubs protest at Hunter College against Trump's "Muslim ban," 2 February 2017. A key demand was for letting CUNY graduate student Saira Rafiee back into the U.S. She had been visiting family in Iran over winter break and was prevented from returning by Trump's ban.

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Cop Terror Stalks...

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landmark of his administration, of a piece with calling neo-Nazis “very fine people.” But racist and anti-immigrant terror did not begin with the xenophobic filth spewed by Donald Trump. Anti-immigrant policies have a long history under both Democratic and Republican presidents: the war on immigrants, black people and all the oppressed “at home” goes hand in hand with unending U.S. imperialist aggression and war abroad. Indeed, most U.S. wars have been led by Democrats, who posture as “friends” of labor, black people, women, etc.

It was during Bill Clinton’s administration that the first stretch of border wall was built, anti-immigrant laws beefed up and “effective death penalty” and vicious “anti-crime” laws enacted, dramatically escalating mass incarceration. It was Barack Obama who massively expanded the deportation machine Trump oversees today, ramping up the militarization of the border and deporting over 8 million immigrants, earning himself the title of “deporter-in-chief.” Democrats continue to push for high-tech “border security” measures in place of Trump’s “wall.”

Once again on June 26, House Democrats overwhelmingly voted to fund the Department of Homeland Security to the tune of \$4.5 billion, which runs the concentration camps of immigrants and refugees on the southern U.S. border. While Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other “progressive” Democrats voted against the funding measure this time (unlike on their first day in office), their key political function is to tie discontented youth and workers to the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism. Their liberal icon, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, threw 100,000 Japanese Americans into concentration camps during World War II. His Democratic successor Harry Truman, after A-bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki, deported millions of Mexican immigrants (and many U.S.-born Mexican Americans), setting the stage for the vilely named “Operation Wetback” mass deportation program under Republican Dwight Eisenhower. Anti-immigrant repression is bipartisan in capitalist America, as it is fundamental to the functioning of capitalism.

Liberals often present more “diversity” and “representation” in positions of power as the solution to racism and anti-immigrant chauvinism. Yet Chulo was killed by a black cop. In the shooting of Stephanie Washington, both officers were black. As for SB 380, it sets up a “police transparency and accountability” task force that would include a disabled person, a “justice-impacted individual”

and a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives in the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus. All the tokenism is the world cannot hide the fact that the function of the police, as an institution, is racist repression in the service of the capitalist system. Like having Obama as the CEO of U.S. imperialism, perpetuating racist wars abroad and ramping up deportations “at home,” the capitalist system is perfectly capable of hypocritically using “diverse” faces in high places to reinforce this racist social order. Only the overthrow of that capitalist social order can get to the roots of racial oppression.

Effective struggle against racist police terror and repression requires massive, militant class struggle. Millions of workers are fed up with poverty pay, racism, the oppression of women and skyrocketing inequality. What is needed is to unchain the power of the working class. That means fighting to free it from subordination to the bosses’ government, institutions, parties and politicians. In this country the key instrument for that subordination is the Democratic Party – the oldest capitalist party in the world.

Yet calls to vote for Democratic politicians or for “community control of the police” are precisely the dangerous illusions peddled by many activists, including many self-described socialists. On March 8, the “Justice for Jayson” campaign put out a memo rightly expressing indignation at the Bridgeport PD. At the same time, it calls for the establishment of an “all civilian review board with power to investigate police” – but the whole history of civilian review boards shows that these do nothing to stop the police from killing black, Latino and other oppressed people. The police cannot be reformed, *only revolution will bring justice*.

Another of their demands was “Reduce Police Power. Build Community Power.” Here too, it is crucial for those who want to do away with racist police terror to see that it is neither a matter of “reducing” the power of police nor of illusory “community control” over them, but overturning the system that breeds police repression. Indeed, this same group has placed blame on the “entire system,” but what needs to be stated clearly is that this system is capitalism, which in the United States was founded on slavery and genocide and whose very existence continues to be rooted in racist oppression.

As we remember Jayson, Chulo, Zoe and so many others whose lives were snuffed out by racist police terror, the goal of ending it forever can only be achieved through international socialist revolution – the conquest of power by the proletariat. But that can never happen so long as the

working class and oppressed are chained to the Democratic Party through their misleaders in the labor bureaucracy and classless “social justice” movements. What’s needed above all is a definitive break with all capitalist parties and the formation of a revolutionary workers party to lead that revolution. This is the path to winning the struggle against racist police terror and every form of social oppression ■



Gothamist

Police carried out 58 arrests on 22 November 2019, at protest denouncing cop brutality in NYC subways. RIY demands: Free them all, drop the charges.

Off the Trains...

continued from page 5

Now that he is making a bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, having again switched parties after his stint as Republican mayor, billionaire Bloomberg is shedding crocodile tears over his stop-and-frisk “mistake.” *Five million stops* is no mistake! And as the pro-police stance of de Blasio and Cuomo over the cop terror in the subways underscores, both parties are racist to their core, upholding American capitalism, which since slavery days has been built on oppression of black people. As we repeatedly pointed out, in major cities across the country, it is Democratic mayors who give the orders to the racist killer cops.

The multiracial crowd of protesters at the November 1 rally correctly denounced the police as racist, but organizers tried to channel the outrage into the dead end of fashionable “identity politics.” They grotesquely attempted to segregate the crowd by ordering white demonstrators to the back and sides of the march and having black protesters move up front. Fortunately, very few complied with that Jim Crow edict. Not only would this have exposed black activists even more directly to the wrath of the police, such ploys reinforce the divisions fostered by the ruling class to prevent the mobilization of the power of the multi-ethnic working class in struggle against black oppression.

Without a political fight against U.S. capitalism’s dual parties of imperialist war and racist repression, nothing will change. The job of the police is to defend the interests of the exploiters and oppressors against

those they exploit and oppress. Breaking the chains that bind working people and the oppressed to the Democratic Party requires a program of political independence from the racist capitalist rulers that points the way to international socialist revolution. The social force that has the power to head up that fight is the working class that makes the cities run, and can bring this citadel of finance capital to a grinding halt. But that requires a fighting leadership.

On October 30, just days before the demonstration against cop terror in the subways, thousands of members of Transport Workers Local 100 gave a taste of their power as they rallied outside MTA headquarters, where management has been stonewalling contract negotiations with the union. Transit workers are fed up with the bosses on the MTA board, most of whom are appointed by Democrat Cuomo, and many said they are ready to strike. Yet the union leaders are in Cuomo’s pocket, backing him at election time and looking to the governor to bail them out.

Local 100 is the stronghold of NYC labor, and if transit workers’ anger were to intersect with the campaign against cop terror in the stations, it would produce an explosive social struggle that would rock the city. The fight against racist police attacks in mass transit and on the streets of the U.S. must be waged politically. Behind each blow inflicted by the enforcers of capitalist “law and order” are the dictates of Wall Street. Only by breaking with the Democrats, forging a class-struggle workers party and organizing on a revolutionary *class* program can working people and the oppressed fight to win. ■

Internationalist photo



Revolutionary Internationalist Youth at 17 July 2019 march in NYC commemorating the five-year anniversary of Eric Garner’s murder by NYPD.



Internationalist photo

At 1 November 2019 protest, RIY and Internationalist Group signs called for cops out of the subways and remembered Allan Feliz, Antonio Williams and Victor Hernandez, youths recently killed by cops in the Bronx.

Free Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange!
Hands Off Edward Snowden!

The Lies Behind Imperialist Crimes: From Pentagon Papers to Afghanistan Papers

PFC David Epstein



Left: Vietnamese man captured by U.S. Army awaiting interrogation, 1967. The Pentagon Papers revealed, among other things, U.S. imperialism's covert torture campaigns and psychological warfare operations in Indochina, including the wholesale slaughter of entire villages suspected of being sympathetic to the National Liberation Front ("Viet Cong"). Right: U.S. imperialism's murderous "war on terror." Marines detain men in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Bryan Denton/Corbis



By Jacob

Last December, the *Washington Post* published a trove of 2,000 internal government documents confirming and demonstrating in bloody, horrendous detail what many had long suspected: that throughout the nearly two decades of U.S. imperialism's criminal war on Afghanistan, three successive administrations, Republican and Democrat alike, together with the military brass they commanded, systematically lied about the war.

The "Afghanistan Papers," obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request and a lengthy legal battle, come from a project entitled "Lessons Learned" carried out by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). This institution of the U.S. government (which calls its colonial occupation "reconstruction") was created in 2008, seven years after the war officially began when Republican president George W. Bush, fulsomely backed by both capi-

talist parties in Congress, launched the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. Between 2014 and 2018, SIGAR conducted interviews with senior officials and military commanders to investigate how their war and occupation became a "failure" in their own terms – that is, in order to derive "lessons" to more effectively prepare for the next time U.S. imperialism invades another semi-colonial, oppressed country.

As highlighted by the *Washington Post* report, "At War with the Truth" (9 December 2019), the documents reveal that the consensus among personnel "from provincial outposts to the highest circles of power," including U.S. diplomats and military officers, as well as Afghan officials, considered the war to be a total farce even as presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, faced with a doubtful public, cited the criminal war's "progress" to justify prolonging U.S. intervention.

An anguished piece in the *Post* (17 December 2019) by liberal columnist Ka-

trina vanden Heuvel began: "They lied. They lied repeatedly, year after year, about America's longest war...." With the Afghanistan war in its 19th year, she noted, the newly published papers showed that "presidents, department heads, generals, civilians and uniformed military up and down the line" had systematically "misled" the public. Moreover, "those who have consistently lied to the American people – the generals, such as David H. Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal; the national intelligence operatives, such as John Brennan and James Clapper; the civilians, such as Obama's former defense secretary, Leon Panetta – populate news talk shows" parading their "expertise" to this day.¹ Vanden Heuvel calls for an "accounting," while studiously avoiding terms like *war crimes* and claiming that the imperialist military can be "reformed." (This is in line with the role her own magazine, *The Nation* – which worked overtime to pitch Obama's "Hope and Change" – plays as a left-liberal publicist for U.S. imperialism's Democratic Party.)

The publication of the Afghanistan Papers reinforces the widespread skepticism towards and distrust of the government within U.S. society since the period when the "Pentagon Papers," from which they draw their name, were published during U.S. imperialism's genocidal, losing war on Vietnam. Leaked by former military analyst Daniel Ellsberg, the "Pentagon Papers" consisted of reports produced by the Department of Defense that were published in the *New York Times* in 1971, against frantic attempts by then-president Richard Nixon's ad-

¹ In 2013, the City University of New York administration made the provocative political decision to hire war criminal Petraeus, former Afghanistan and Iraq war commander and ex-chief of the CIA, to "teach" at CUNY. On the campaign against this launched by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, see "David 'Death Squad' Petraeus: Out of CUNY Now!" and related materials in *Revolution* No. 10, October 2013.

ministration to stop their publication. As detailed further below, they revealed the endless lies pumped out by each and every Democratic and Republican administration throughout the course of the war, and its secret widening, in the face of mass domestic opposition, into Laos and Cambodia. In short, the Pentagon Papers were a bombshell.

Today, however, the reception to the release of the "Afghanistan Papers," based on SIGAR's internal report, has been drastically different. Decades after the Vietnamese Revolution inflicted a stinging defeat on U.S. imperialism, and the Watergate scandal unleashed a torrent of revelations of government deception and permanent war, it is widely taken for granted that the U.S. government, its politicians and bureaucrats, are a sordid collection of lying crooks. (Unlike both liberals and conservatives, revolutionary Marxists point out that this reflects the very nature and function of the bourgeois state: representing the interests of the capitalist ruling class.) At the same time, some of the most sinister institutions of capitalist rule, like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), have had their images refurbished in the wake of Trump's election.

These organizations, collectively responsible for the overthrow of elected governments from South America to Africa, and for the murder and imprisonment of countless revolutionaries, fighters for democratic rights, and opponents of U.S. imperialist war, have been elevated by the Democratic Party to the status of national heroes, and have been increasingly integrated into the ranks of its representatives in Congress.

What U.S. imperialism and its CIA operatives have done in Afghanistan is a sinister story indeed. To understand recent events, it is important to go back to the U.S. role in fostering reactionary

Alamy



Prisoners being transported to U.S. imperialism's Guantánamo Bay torture center, 2002. Many would languish there for years without charge or trial.

August 2020

terror in Afghanistan during the administrations of Democrat Jimmy Carter, followed by Republican Ronald Reagan. In 1978, Afghanistan underwent its “April Revolution,” an effort launched by modernizing intellectuals of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) to carry out modest land reform and introduce some democratic rights, among them legal equality and education for women.

“The fact [is] that under the Soviet-allied PDPA, for the first time in history Afghan women were freed from the suffocating head-to-toe burqa, that girls could become literate, study in schools and universities and become teachers and scientists.” Of course, such things were “never mentioned” as bourgeois politicians and their kept media beat the drums for the U.S. invasion in 2001 while hypocritically claiming to care about Afghan women (see “U.S. Sponsors Enslavers of Afghan Women,” *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001).

In 1979, the Carter administration launched “Operation Cyclone,” the code-name for the clandestine program to arm, bankroll and train Islamist *mujahedin* (holy warriors) waging an ultra-reactionary war to overthrow the Soviet-allied reform regime in Afghanistan. Continuing under Reagan, the decade-long operation was “one of the biggest ever mounted by the Central Intelligence Agency,” reported the *New York Times* (18 April 1988). The left-nationalist PDPA, while hardly “communist,” was targeted by this murderous backlash launched by mullahs (religious authorities) and other sectors that lived from the “bride price,” ruthless exploitation of the rural poor and other forms of deeply entrenched oppression. Particularly incensed by even modest efforts to foster women’s rights, they denounced teaching girls to read and write as atheistic heresy. (Among those working with the CIA in Afghanistan was one Osama bin Laden. And, of course, his anti-Soviet insurgency was the seedbed for the Taliban.)

The U.S. was eager to have a counterrevolutionary base of operations on the Soviet Union’s vulnerable southern border. When the Soviet Union intervened in December 1979 to stave off a collapse of the embattled Afghan government, the Carter administration revved up Cold War II. The bourgeois press helped whip up the anti-Soviet war drive and praised the woman-hating cutthroats as “freedom fighters.” Most of the fake left joined in the anti-Soviet frenzy. In contrast, genuine revolutionaries – Trotskyists – proclaimed “Hail Red Army” in Afghanistan and called for the gains of the October Revolution of 1917 to be extended to the central Asian country.

The Stalinist bureaucrats who governed the USSR, seeking illusory “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism, eventually abandoned their half-hearted defense of Afghanistan, and after Mikhail Gorbachev ordered Soviet forces’ withdrawal, the country was plunged into decades of fundamentalist terror and the caprices of regional warlords.

Democrats Hail Imperialism’s Murder, Inc.

Today, this history is part of what the Democratic Party wants to whitewash away as it paints a picture of dutiful, patriotic CIA agents joining the “resistance” to Trump. Hailed as a heroic whistleblower, it was an



Above: Volunteers for women’s militia organized in 1989 by Soviet-allied Afghan government. With their rights under direct assault by U.S.-backed *mujahedin* “holy warriors,” Afghan women fought back.

intelligence official who exposed Trump’s 25 July 2019 phone call with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, which then led to the impeachment probe and trial. This came after the Russia/Trump investigation conducted by former FBI chief Robert Mueller – who was instrumental in selling the lies sold as a pretext for the Iraq War. The Democrats’ scenario of Mueller serving as “savior of American democracy” fizzled. But with Trump’s Ukraine call, Democrats trumpeted that now they had their smoking gun, and it was all thanks to a career spy-turned-whistleblower.

But as the Internationalist Group wrote last October, “the idea that it was the work of a lone courageous CIA ‘whistleblower’ is ludicrous. It’s quite clear that the ‘national security’ apparatus up to its very top levels decided to launch the operation” (“Impeachment Crisis: ‘Deep State’ vs. Bigot-in-Chief,” *The Internationalist* No. 57, September-October 2019). So the very institutions key to preparing and carrying out the U.S. imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in Vietnam and Korea, are hailed as supposed champions of all that is right and good by the Democratic Party.² Needless to say, as they are up to their necks in capitalism’s crimes themselves, their impeachment of Trump was not for his crimes against immigrants, incitement of racist violence and myriad attacks on democratic rights. Instead, it was for holding up weapons of war for a “strategic ally” of U.S. imperialism, thereby infringing “national security.”

It’s no wonder, then, that the Afghanistan Papers have largely remained under the radar.

² For more on the real history of the imperialists’ Murder, Inc., see “CIA Out of CUNY Now!”, “Speaking Out Against the U.S. War Machine” and related articles in *Revolution* No. 15, September 2018.



Frank Augstein / AP



Markus Schreiber / AP



Phillip Faraone / Getty

From left: Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden. These couragenous individuals risked their lives to expose just some of the brutality and widespread spying carried out by U.S. imperialism.

ogy firms such as Google, Facebook and Apple.

The capitalist state began an immediate and relentless pursuit of Manning, Snowden and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange under the Espionage Act, a drive which has recently been escalated. Following the leaks, Manning was imprisoned by military jailers in Kuwait, held in a cage within a tent in the searing desert heat. She was later transferred to the brig of the Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia. There,

“Manning spent 23 hours a day in a 6-by-8-foot cell, for nearly nine months, much of it on Prevention of Injury, or P.O.I., status, in conditions that a United Nations special rapporteur later said could qualify as torture.” – *New York Times*, 12 June 2017

The Obama administration began a criminal investigation into Assange, while Sweden sought his extradition from the UK, compelling him to take refuge in the Ecuadoran embassy. In 2013, the U.S. government charged him under the Espionage Act; he faces up to 175 years in prison. As for Snowden, after his revelations he was forced into exile in Russia.

Manning was released in 2017 after her sentence was commuted, but was sent back to prison last March after refusing to testify against Assange. She is being charged a fine of \$1,000 for every day she does not testify. Manning’s imprisonment in retaliation for not testifying is another instance of her treatment that has been formally classed as an act of torture (*NPR*, 12 December 2019, citing U.N. special rapporteur on torture). Assange was arrested in London last April after the Ecuadoran government withdrew his asylum. He has reportedly been kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day.

An open letter of over 60 doctors confirms that Assange’s health is deteriorating so quickly due to maltreatment that he “could die in prison” (*The Guardian*, 25 November 2019). Hearings over extradition to the U.S. are scheduled to begin in February. We demand: **Free Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange! Drop all charges now! Hands off Edward Snowden!**

Lying Through Their Teeth

The significance of The Afghanistan Papers lies in that once again, they expose the total cynicism and duplicity of the American ruling class, its political representatives – Democrats and Republicans alike – and armed forces propagandists. They have also inadvertently displayed the role of the bourgeois press, particularly the liberal *Washington Post* itself, as a vehicle for marshaling public opinion on behalf of the ruling class, as they churned out articles, columns and opinion pieces supporting military intervention and escalation. The *Post* even denied the signifi-

cance of the 2010 WikiLeaks revelations, which in addition to exposing U.S. war crimes made public the “military failures” and graft that, almost a decade later, bourgeois pundits have met with expressions of shock.

In their assessments of the Afghanistan Papers, the capitalist media say little about the terror and murder wrought by U.S. imperialism in its colonial occupation of that country. In fact, the reflections of the bourgeois journalists have served to further falsify the motives and character of the war. The *Post*’s six-part report authored by Craig Whitlock is part exposé, part cost-benefit analysis for U.S. imperialism, critiquing the strategy and tactics with which it pursued its objectives, while essentially accepting those objectives – and the imperialist system behind them. The underlying assumption is that the war is basically just but the methods are flawed. Whitlock even goes as far as to peddle the typical colonialist narrative that the U.S. occupation has been benevolent, even *too generous*, portraying the imperialists building schools, hospitals and roads. According to him, military objectives floundered as a result of supposedly humanitarian efforts aimed at “re-building a shattered [country]”:

“Despite vows the U.S. wouldn’t get mired in ‘nation-building,’ it’s wasted billions doing just that.... The U.S. flooded the country with money – then turned a blind eye to the graft it fueled.... The scale of the corruption was the unintended result of swamping the war zone with far more aid and defense contracts than impoverished Afghanistan could absorb.”

So the imperialists play the role of purported philanthropists by allowing the defense contractors and local elites to line their pockets. And in this way Whitlock and the other bourgeois journalists coach the imperialists about their thoughtless charity, lack of a clearly defined strategy, etc.

Despite the certainty with which the war objectives were laid out and “progress” was proclaimed in press conferences by the Bush administration, the SIGAR documents reveal that two years into the war, Bush’s war secretary Donald Rumsfeld was writing: “I have no visibility into who the bad guys are in Afghanistan or Iraq. I read all the intel from the community, and it sounds as though we know a great deal, but in fact, when you push at it, you find out we haven’t got anything that is actionable.” (8 September 2003 memo quoted in Whitlock, “The Afghanistan Papers” 9 December 2019).

In a 2015 interview with SIGAR, published by the *Post* in the Afghanistan Papers, retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Michael Flynn, who later became National Security Advisor to Donald Trump, speaks with horrific candor about the imperialist war machine:

“There is a machinery that is behind what we do, and it keeps us participating in the conflict because it generates wealth....

“I spent three years hunting human beings to kill them or capture them in Iraq, Afghanistan and East Africa. We refined our processes in Iraq. We experimented with capabilities, techniques and procedures in Iraq. What we learned in Iraq, we began to apply actually globally, because that was JSOC’s [Joint Special Operations Command] mission....

“As intelligence makes its way up higher, it gets consolidated and really watered down; it gets politicized. It gets politicked because once policymakers get their hands on it, and frankly once operational commanders get their hands on it, they put their twist to it.... After 2006, for me, it was actually irrelevant because we were just killing so many people and it wasn’t making any difference at all. We were capturing a lot of people too. Commanders and policymakers, on the spectrum of news, they want to always be good news. Operational commanders, State Department policymakers, and Department of Defense policymakers are going to be inherently rosy in their assessments. They will be unaccepting of hard hitting intelligence.”

Yet these particular statements are omitted from the *Post*’s coverage of the SIGAR findings. The total silence about the slaughter and plunder by marauding U.S. invaders is astounding, especially after months of wide coverage on war crimes by Navy SEAL chief Edward Gallagher, the attempted internal cover-up of his activities by the officer corps, and the scandalous clemency granted to the sadistic murderer by Trump, who then brought him to his Mar-A-Lago resort.

Gallagher indiscriminately killed civilians, including children, and posed with the corpse of a teenage captive he had slain with a hunting knife. Of course, the military brass knows such acts are part and parcel of the colonial occupation, but they objected to Trump’s glorification of Gallagher, as this open embrace of war crimes broadcasts to the entire world the limitless cruelty of U.S. imperialism and its endless wars.

The Pentagon Papers

Almost a half century before the Afghanistan Papers, the Pentagon Papers were leaked by Daniel Ellsberg and published by the *New York Times* in 1971. Revealed to the public, they presented one damning revelation after another about U.S. imperialism’s war in Vietnam, and the extent of U.S. involvement going back to the French war to keep Indochina as a colony after World War II. Ellsberg, formerly a military analyst at the RAND Corporation, had leaked a several thousand-page study of the war conducted by Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense under Democratic presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

The Department of Defense documents revealed that the U.S. war against the heroic Vietnamese Revolution was essentially unwinnable.³ This sharply contradicted the pronouncements of Kennedy and Johnson, and later of Republican Richard Nixon. Without public

³ As we note in our in-depth discussion of the war in *Revolution* No. 15 (September 2018), in 1954 Communist-led independence forces defeated the French in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. With capitalist rule smashed in the northern part of Vietnam, the southern half was given back to the defeated imperialists’ collaborators. What the Vietnamese called the “American War” pitted the U.S. and its “South Vietnam” puppet forces against the incredibly courageous NLF and North Vietnamese combatants, whose victory in 1975 reunified Vietnam, which Trotskyists characterize as a “bureaucratically deformed workers state,” calling for its unconditional defense against imperialism and counterrevolution, and for a proletarian political revolution to establish workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism.



Astrid Riecken/Getty

Republicans and Democrats, dual parties of U.S. imperialism. Above: Obamas and Bushes at inauguration of African American History Museum in Washington D.C., 24 September 2016.

knowledge, the U.S. had begun sending shipments of military equipment to the French since 1950, and was subsidizing the majority of the French war by 1954. In that same year the U.S. began to undertake direct “acts of sabotage and terror warfare against North Vietnam” (*New York Times*, 13 June 1971), contrary to the claims the Eisenhower and later Kennedy administrations made that only military “advisors” were sent to the region.

The documents also revealed how, after the imperialists created the puppet state of “South Vietnam,” the U.S. installed the dictator Ngo Dinh Diem in 1955, then abetted the military coup against him and his ultimate assassination in 1963. The next year, under JFK’s successor Lyndon B. Johnson, came the bipartisan congressional Tonkin Gulf Resolution, one of the most notorious fabrications of a *casus belli* (pretext for war). LBJ’s massive escalation was followed by Nixon’s carpet bombing.

The Pentagon Papers revealed that by 1965 the Defense Department’s main priority, evaluated at 70% of its aims, was “to avoid a humiliating US defeat.”⁴ As for us revolutionary Marxists, we called for the defeat of the U.S. imperialists’ counter-revolutionary war and the triumph of the social revolution in Vietnam. And in fact the war was ended not by “peace” marches but through the military victory of the heroic National Liberation Front (NLF or “Viet Cong”) and North Vietnamese combatants – an inspiration for the working class and the oppressed the world over, including within the United States.

As they did then, liberals today refer to the Vietnam War as a “mistake,” as if it were just the result of a misconception. In reality, the genocidal U.S. war, which killed an estimated three million people – with the U.S. dropping more than twice the amount of bombs than all sides in World War II – “resulted from the system of imperialism, ‘the highest stage of capitalism,’ which cannot be explained away or reformed away as just some mistaken

⁴ Draft Memorandum from John McNaughton to Robert McNamara, “Proposed Course of Action re: Vietnam,” 24 March 1965, reprinted in *The Pentagon Papers* (Beacon Press, 1972). McNaughton was an Assistant Secretary under McNamara, the former Ford Motor Co. executive who oversaw the war under Kennedy and Johnson. After his stint as the Democrats’ Secretary of “Defense,” that is mass murder, McNamara became president of the World Bank. He is the subject of the chilling documentary *The Fog of War* (2003).

policy” (“Vietnam: A Historic Defeat for U.S. Imperialism,” *Revolution* No. 15, September 2018). Understanding this is essential for any real fight against imperialism, based on the program of international socialist revolution.

Censorship Bid Fails

Panicked by the Pentagon Papers, the Nixon administration took legal action against both the whistleblower Ellsberg, for leaking the documents, and the *New York Times*, attempting to prevent their publication. Ellsberg was prosecuted under the Espionage Act along with several other charges of theft and conspiracy, threatening a total maximum sentence of 115 years in prison. The case was dismissed only after it was revealed that the FBI had Ellsberg wiretapped, and agents had broken into the office of his psychoanalyst to swipe files in search of black-mail information.

In his recent book *Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear Planner* (2018), based on his experiences working in the U.S. nuclear program in the 1960s, Ellsberg explains that the Pentagon Papers were only a fraction of the Top-Secret-rated documents he copied between 1969 and 1970. Complications arising from his civil case prevented him from disclosing another, much larger, tranche of documents relating to nuclear planning. These revealed the elaborate plans of U.S. imperialism in the event of war to obliterate the Soviet Union and China through nuclear strikes, which the planners estimated would cause 275 million fatalities and the death of an additional 50 million from fallout.⁵

The combined effects of U.S. imperialism’s defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate affair, in which the Nixon administration burglarized and bugged the Democratic Party headquarters and then launched an escalating cover-up, was mass public distrust of the government. The Pentagon Papers fueled that distrust by publicly exposing government lies and criminality.

The stunning defeat that the Vietnamese Revolution inflicted on U.S. imperialism hammered home, for large sections of the U.S. public, the fact that the lies “their” government had used to sell the

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⁵ A briefing paper intended for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1961 outlined these plans, and was brought to light in 2011 by George Washington University’s National Security Archive through a Freedom of Information Act request. The briefing can be found here: <https://nsarchive.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/1961-06-26a.pdf>.

George Floyd...

continued from page 1

marchers chant them, some of us add “It never stops.” Why is it, year after year, day after day, that the list keeps getting longer? Simply put, it is an outgrowth of the function of the police. Born as a professionalized force from the slave patrols in the U.S. South, the police serve the ruling elite and protect their property and social order. That is the fundamental role of the cops under capitalism. And today that class whose property and wealth have always depended on subjugation, and the power to maintain it, is the one that calls the shots. Literally. No set of policies will alter the social role and function of the police and no amount of “moral suasion” or “implicit bias training” will get them to somehow be egalitarian or non-repressive, since repression is their job and upholding social inequality and exploitation their very purpose.

Now, cops and even notorious police chiefs are displaying supposed “solidarity” with marchers at some protests, “taking a knee” with protesters. It should come as no surprise, though, when these same police officers brutalize and arrest protesters mere hours after the charade, as has happened repeatedly. The numerous racist curfews are enforced by these same police. (Yes, the curfews are racist; they are legal weapons to suppress protests against racist terror. Here in New York, “progressive Democrat” mayor Bill de Blasio has imposed an 8 p.m. curfew, with cops wielding it to round up protesters.) Repression of the ongoing protests has been severe – including driving vehicles into protesters.

Trump has added fuel to the fire, threatening martial law and having mounted cops and tear gas drive protesters away from the White House so he could pose for a photo-op, bible in hand, outside a nearby church. Co-host to the horror show is presumptive Democratic Party nominee for president Joe Biden, who suggested that police shoot unarmed people “in the leg” rather than in the chest. Is it better to die whilst bleeding out from your femoral artery or perish quicker with a bullet (and knowing cops, it is likely to be dozens or hundreds of them) to the chest? The simple

Juneteenth ILWU Port Shutdown



For workers strikes against racist police terror! On June 19, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down all 29 West Coast ports of the U.S. and Canada against police brutality and systemic racism. Above: Thousands marched through the Port of Oakland as the giant cranes in the distance stood idle with their booms up.

Bay Area News Group

answer is: neither.

Meanwhile, ex-candidate and Biden endorser Bernie Sanders has proposed a list of police “reforms,” including his dangerous call to make social workers, EMTs, etc. into a “supplement [to] law enforcement.”

Just as previous police reforms – from more racial diversity to civilian review boards, to bodycams and implicit bias training – did not change the function of police, while the list of those they kill and maim keeps growing, neither will the current reform proposals. As many protesters and commentators state, the issue is systemic. I believe it is essential today to help young anti-racist protesters think through what that means. “Systemic” means inherent to the nature of this system, which continually creates racist oppression. That system is capitalism. Racist police violence cannot be ended within the confines of the already existing capitalist system. This has been demonstrated time and again with the ebb and flow of killings and protests over the course of the last two decades. And it has been demonstrated anew with each new set of “police reforms,” which have done nothing to end the killings or ameliorate the constant racist brutalization.

Democratic Party: Roadblock to Black Liberation

Central to this all, and what is in danger of occurring again during the current cycle of fervent protest, is the funneling of dissent into the Democratic Party. Yes, it is the Democratic Party, the oldest and most experienced capitalist party in the world, which has proved, and indeed will prove, to be the central roadblock to black liberation.

The racist and misogynistic bigot-in-chief in the White House flagrantly stokes race hate and xenophobia. Yet the Democrats, too, uphold the social order that makes racism systemic, have built up its forces of racist repression, and wield them against the oppressed. Democratic mayors largely control the urban centers in this country, and their police forces. It is these Democratic mayors who have instituted the various curfews and police crackdowns, and a series of Democratic Party governors have, along with their Republican confederates, deployed the National Guard.

Black Democratic Party politicians, such as Lori Lightfoot and Keisha Lance Bottoms, mayors of Chicago and Atlanta, respectively, have led the way in such draconian and racist measures. The latter was supported in an address by rapper Killer Mike who proceeded to grovel at the feet of the masters, while wearing a “Kill Your Masters” T-shirt. As the politicians speak out of both sides of their mouths, decrying the murder of Floyd while lambasting protesters for “violence,” it’s clear whose side the Democrats are on. It is the Democratic Party which seeks to advance racist gun control legislation,² which would block the crucial right of self-defense (central to the advocacy and practice of black freedom pioneers from Ida B. Wells, Robert F. Williams, the Deacons for Defense, the Black Panthers and many others). And as has been made abundantly clear, the police can obviously not be relied upon for protection

from the likes of the white supremacists and fascists like the Ku Klux Klan, with which they have so often, in this country’s deadly history, gone hand in hand.

Trump has menaced on Twitter that “when the looting starts the shooting starts.” Is it surprising to know that Obama called protesters thugs and criminals during the upsurges over police violence in 2014 and 2015 (*New York Times*, 28 April 2015)? Not if we understand what “systemic racial oppression” actually means, and the bipartisan nature of how it is administered in capitalist America. Then as now, it was Democrats who called out the militarized police and National Guard. While Trump and his media chorus rant against “anarchists” and antifascist activists to spur on more reactionary and racist backlash, a string of Democratic mayors and governors threaten “outside agitators.” As a pretext

for repression they cite vandalism and the destruction of property, as they have *ad nauseam* whenever these flashpoints erupt.

The lives of black and brown people do not in fact matter in the least to the ruling class (nor do those of poor white and working people or any others “essential” but expendable in their profit system). America’s foremost class-war prisoner, former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, asked the question in the title of his recent book, *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?* Today, with massive outrage at the murder of George Floyd, and given the daily oppression so many black people face, a striking 54% of Americans think protesters were justified when they overran and razed a police precinct building in Minneapolis.

Which side are we on? Not a hard one to answer. There is only one side to choose here, that of the oppressor, or that of the oppressed. The Democratic Party is no solution. What is needed for genuine black liberation is not just an upheaval, but an overthrow of the capitalist system. Today, many a liberal and social democrat talks of “dismantling white supremacy” and “decolonizing spaces” by “checking privilege” and other ritual phrases to claim change through a combination of moral suasion and guilt-tripping, while continuing to herd people into the Democratic Party. Those who may signal “wokeness” with a reference to Malcolm X (in the same breath as MLK), rendering him a harmless icon, conveniently neglect to mention that he pointedly condemned all obeisance and support to the Democratic Party, castigating it as a pillar of racism. And if he was right to emphasize that “you can’t have capitalism without racism” – which he was – then what this means must be brought home to young protesters today.

Racial oppression must be smashed, torn asunder, fundamentally defeated and torn up by the roots. This can only be achieved through a social revolution. With so many now joining protests, often for the first time, I believe it is crucial to help the most thoughtful grasp the meaning of a revolutionary program for black freedom,

Revolution



Bourgeois fakery: Congressional Democrats, led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, take a knee in African kente cloth, June 8. In major cities across the U.S., Democrats are the bosses of the racist killer cops.

Manuel Balce Ceneta / AP

² See “Who Controls the Guns?” in *The Internationalist* No. 34 (March-April 2013) and “Democrats Exploit School Shooting to Push Racist Gun Control” in *The Internationalist* No. 51 (March-April 2018).

that is, of black liberation through socialist revolution.

For protests flooding the street are not enough, inspiring as they may be. The most striking aspects of the protests here in New York City, where I live, are the multi-racial makeup, the amount of youth (many protesters are in their late teens and early twenties), and the demonstrations' largely unorganized – that is, spontaneous – character. Even with COVID-19 an ever-present threat, thousands have poured into the streets to protest the killing of Floyd and so many others, and indeed the systemic violence against blacks so central to U.S. society. In a way that sometimes has the quality of ritual, they are chanting the now popularized “official” slogans of “No Justice, No Peace,” “Black Lives Matter” and “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot,” amongst others. And from reports around the country, this trend is not unique to NYC, as the protests have now spread to every U.S. state. The demonstrations have spread so widely that the National Guard has been mobilized in over half of the states.

Workers Strikes Against Racist Repression

The unorganized and spontaneous nature of these protests is one part of where we find their limitations. Demonstrators horrified, chilled to the bone and filled with anger at the wanton killing of black people obviously shed no tears for corporate private property. But no amount of shattered glass can change the racist status quo beyond mere policy adjustments and tinkering and a further sprinkling of “black faces in high places,” when what is needed is at the level of the social. To overcome the racial oppression which is, and always has been, part of the bedrock of American capitalism, the power of the multiracial working class must be mobilized. The working class in this country, with its large and strategic black and immigrant component, is the only social force with the ability to carry through this momentous task. And time and again, going back to the struggle to smash slavery, black freedom struggles have been on the cutting edge of class struggle in this country. Part of that history – often “buried” and important to unearth and communicate far

and wide – is the fight for workers defense guards³ against racist terror, and the West Coast longshore union’s port shutdowns for Mumia’s freedom (joining with workers in Brazil), against the police murder of Oscar Grant (depicted in the film *Fruitvale Station*) and against imperialist war in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴

Right now, it is urgent that labor bring its power to bear in the ongoing struggle. I witnessed the potential for this in micro-cosm at the Barclays Center in Brooklyn when an MTA bus driver refused to transport people who the cops arrested (after having beaten them with clubs). On May 29, the Transport Workers Union’s powerful New York local stated that “bus operators do not work for the NYPD” (New York Police Department) and “should refuse to transport arrested protestors.” In Minneapolis too, bus drivers are refusing to do the police’s dirty work, and now the Washington, D.C. transit union has followed suit. What is needed now more than ever are workers strikes against racist repression, the curfews and the threats of martial law. To shut down the ports, to quit transporting goods and harvesting food, to cease the functioning of transit, in other words, to paralyze the system.

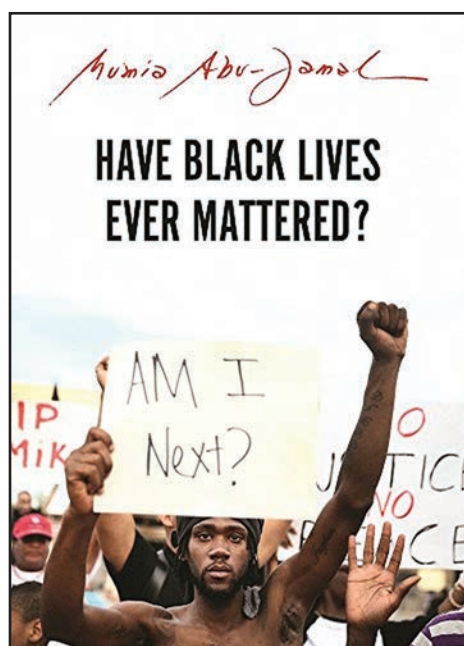
Such strikes against racist terror, deploying workers power at the point of production, transport and communications, would link the still largely middle-class and youth protest movement with the working class that makes everything run in this society. Youth alone do not have the social power to overturn this racist system, and neither do black people in and of themselves, but those whose labor keeps it running, and can bring it to a halt, do. Doubly oppressed, in cities throughout the U.S. black workers are concentrated in strategic sectors of the capitalist economy. Today there is enormous potential to take the lead in joining with their class sisters and brothers, immigrant, Latino, Asian, white, Native American, as the current anti-racist struggle, combined with economic crisis and the pandemic’s ravages against the workers and poor, shakes this country. With their hands on the levers of social power, workers, many of them black, have the ability and requisite power to challenge and indeed overturn this racist system.

Here too the question of leadership is crucial. For far too long official “leaders” have chained black people, Latinos, immigrants and the working class as a whole to this social order, through the Democratic Party. Studying black freedom struggles here and elsewhere back to the Haitian Revolution of Toussaint Louverture,⁵ we see that revolutionary leadership is key.

³ In 1975, C.B. Dennis, a black auto worker in Chicago’s United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 6, was the target of a racist attack when his newly purchased home in the predominantly white neighborhood of Broadview was firebombed. Militants of the Labor Struggle Caucus in Local 6, supported by the then-revolutionary Spartacist League, organized workers defense guards to stand watch outside Dennis’s home, sending a clear message that an injury to one is an injury to all and putting an end to the attacks.

⁴ Once again, longshore workers have taken up the call for workers action against racist police terror, shutting down all 29 West Coast ports this past Juneteenth to protest “police brutality and systemic racism.” See “ILWU Port Shutdown: Bay Area March/Rally Against Racist Police Brutality” in *The Internationalist* No. 60 (May-June 2020).

⁵ See “Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution” at internationalist.org.



Cover of Mumia Abu-Jamal’s 2017 book, *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?* Mumia is the foremost class-war prisoner in the U.S., imprisoned since 1982 on frame-up charges as revenge for his coverage of racist police repression in Philadelphia. August 2020



Internationalist contingent at NYC Juneteenth march against racist police repression, June 19, with banner saying “Democrats Are Bosses of Racist Killer Cops,” “The Police Can’t Be ‘Reformed’” and calling for “Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution.”

Today that poses a crucial need for a revolutionary workers party.

Its need is more urgent than ever right here, right now.

Working-class struggle is necessary lest the wave of discontent fall back into the dead end of relying on Democrats to fix a situation they neither want to nor are capable of remedying. The ruling class has offered some sacrificial lambs (to save the little semblance of face that it has) in arresting the officers guilty of Floyd’s murder. But as radical students of the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York (where I work) pointed out during the last wave of police brutality protests, “There is No Justice in Racist Capitalist America.” Only 1% of cops who kill unarmed civilians are convicted, and at that with paltry sentences. The cop who murdered Oscar Grant in 2009 was given two years for an execution-style killing. Only three of the six who snapped Freddie Gray’s neck in 2015 with a “rough ride” were charged, and not one convicted. The list goes on.

People on the outside of the protests looking in have contributed by making social media posts, which largely get lost in the cacophony that is online politics, or by donating to various organizations, often bail funds. While these bail funds are important, particularly so with the racist dragnets of the curfew in various locales, many of the other organizations to which people donate lobby Democrats and are aligned with them, at least in part, in the failed strategy to somehow effect “social justice” through one of the two main organs of racist capitalist rule in the U.S. The Democrats are already attempting

to steer discontent with the system into the capitalist parties’ electoralism which helps keep the ghastly realities of this society alive. With double-speak and duplicity they have just reauthorized the USA Freedom Act, which affords Trump more police powers. They are, alongside Trump and the Republicans, the many-headed hydra, essentially the same beast with different heads.

The politics of lesser evilism will not suffice in the current moment as civil society shows increasing fractures and the specter of civil war is once again no figment of imagination. The Civil War has rightly been called the Second American Revolution. With the key participation of 180,000 black troops, it defeated the Southern slavery, but the Northern bourgeoisie betrayed the promise of black freedom.

Today, a Third American Revolution will be necessary to end the subjugation of black people, but that will only be the case if it is a war between social classes. For their part, the two big factions of the ruling class, Democrat and Republican, differ on how to administer the endless war of the exploiters against black people, immigrants and the working class as a whole. With an election in November, both are gearing up for intensified conflict with China, with Biden actually positioning himself to the right of Trump (*NPR*, 22 April) in the saber-rattling – two racist imperialists indeed.

With all this in mind, amidst the din of police sirens and bullhorns, the thrumming of helicopters and cadence of thousands of protesters, we must remember: “Only Revolution Can Bring Justice!” ■



Supporters of the Internationalist Group with members of Bay Area ILWU Local 10 on June 19 during West Coast port shutdown.

What Led Me to RIY

Feminism or Women's Liberation?

By Noor

In the late 1980s, my parents immigrated to New York City from Bangladesh, in search of a better life. They settled in Queens, New York – the most ethnically diverse borough in the city. Queens is famous for having countless immigrant enclaves, including a massive South Asian community, so it made sense that my parents felt most comfortable living there. After their arrival, they had four children – three sons and one daughter (me). Like many South Asian men in New York, my father became a cab driver; my mother stayed home to take care of the house and kids.

Growing up as the only girl in a male-dominated Bangladeshi household, I was proud of my culture and background but also quickly became aware of my position in the family. I watched my brothers go out whenever they wanted, wear whatever they wanted and speak their minds freely to our parents. In contrast, I was expected to be soft-spoken, modest and dedicated to helping my mother take care of the household. In my college years, being with my parents and their friends meant being asked questions about my marriage prospects and whether I would be a good wife to a future husband. There was always an unquestioned expectation that I would inevitably get married, have children and take care of my family. No one I grew up with ever asked me if I actually wanted that for myself. No one ever took me seriously when I said that I didn't want kids. It felt as though being female defined the way everyone perceived me, at the same time as I would often be called out for not acting "feminine" enough.

As I got older, I became annoyed that I was always held to different standards than my male counterparts. I was tired of regularly being asked about marriage and bearing children, as if that were the basic appropriate conversation topic. It especially bothered me that I was still surrounded by sexist ideologies while being a child of immigrants in a country that supposedly encourages equality between men and women. The reality of these experiences led me to ask questions about how I and others could be liberated from these backward expectations. When I went to college

and became a sociology major, I began to further investigate women's oppression through an academic lens. I was immediately introduced to feminism, finding what seemed like explanations for and solutions to my problems and those of other women – and I was hooked. What I was taught will sound familiar to many: that women's oppression is caused by sexist and misogynist ideas imposed by men onto women; and that the fight for equality is a fight against those ideas.

In my classes, we studied numerous feminist theories and approaches: transnational feminism, post-colonial feminism, black feminism, "xenofeminism," eco-feminism, the list goes on. I read countless books and essays by authors like bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Emi Koyama and Juliet Jacques, drawn to the many different flavors and interpretations of feminism's basic premises and conclusions. It felt as if there was a different type of feminism for every identity out there. I enjoyed learning about these differing perspectives and felt solidarity with other women who seemed to be fighting for the same cause. My favorite thing about feminism was that it claimed inclusivity – anyone could be a feminist so long as they believed that women should be equal to men.

As I continued my college education, I became interested in revolutionary politics through reading Karl Marx in my sociology courses. I came across the CUNY Internationalist Clubs at a Hunter College club fair in 2018. I was also interested in the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims that they had initiated, and participated with them in activities defending immigrant students and workers.

At the time, I thought I knew what "being a Marxist" meant, and that Marxism and feminism were just two sides of the same coin. So after going to a few Club meetings, I was surprised to learn that these Marxists, who said they fight very militantly for women's liberation, were not also feminists. After all, I had spent years studying feminism in school, where it is advertised as the solution for women's oppression (and any deviation from this ideology is frowned upon). So I was confused by their insistence that women's liberation could only be achieved through socialist revolution, and that this was somehow

counterposed to feminism. As a self-identified radical feminist, I was convinced that if one did not fully agree with or accept the program of feminism as an absolute truth, there was no way they could be an advocate for women's liberation.

Like many, I had always assumed that women's liberation and feminism were the same thing. But these Marxists were saying that in reality, far from being synonyms, there is a counterposition between the two. I kept asking myself, "What don't these people understand? Feminism means creating a society in which women are equal to men, the concept is so simple! If Marxists fight against women's oppression, why aren't they feminists?"

As I attended more Club meetings and undertook political discussions with members of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (RIY), I saw that they were serious about fighting for women's liberation. In the course of this I joined the Internationalist Club. We spent weeks preparing for our event on International Women's Day (before meeting them I had never learned its origins as a socialist holiday), where we gave presentations about and honored radical and revolutionary women such as Ida B. Wells, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Louise Michel, Alexandra Kollontai and others.¹

The Internationalist Club dedicated the entire month of March to studying Bolshevik writings on the woman question. I was introduced to the works of Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Rosa Luxemburg, revolutionary women I had never encountered in my academic courses. Their points about liberation were profound. When studying oppression in my sociology classes, I had never considered its *material basis*. My focus had always been on attacking the ideologies perpetuated by the people I grew up with and by society in general. I was now learning that ideas and historical changes are based on material conditions.

In the case of women's oppression, misogyny and sexism are ideological manifestations that arise as justifications and explanations for it. Marxists combat them intransigently, and have always supported any step or genuine reform that advances women's rights and conditions, while explaining that the capitalist system can't be reformed away. So obviously, we need to fight every form of backward ideology and



Bourgeois propaganda, anyone? "Queens of the Resistance" biographical series describes Democratic politicians Pelosi, Ocasio-Cortez and other prominent Congresswomen as "beloved boss ladies," stating "it's time to yield to the alternative – the power of women."

bigotry – but in order to *win* that fight we need to uproot the material conditions that continually generate them.

When I read Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, I learned that women's oppression under capitalism is rooted in the nuclear family. I was never taught in my Women and Gender Studies courses that the nuclear family is the main institution through which wealth and property are passed down from one generation to the next. I began to understand that private property is passed via familial lines through men's children. Women are expected to bear those children and devote much of their lives to maintaining them.

Additionally, the nuclear family is where the next generation of laborers are brought up and taught conformity and subservience, so that they too can labor better for the sake of capital. It is through the institution of the family that marriage, child-rearing (for women), the domestic servitude of housework (for women), and monogamy (for women) subjugate women. It is out of these oppressive conditions that male-chauvinist, sexist, misogynist ideologies arise to justify and explain women's oppression. The Marxist program for women's liberation underscores the need to provide social institutions that can systematically replace this subjugation, socializing these tasks as part of building an egalitarian, socialist society.

Feminism inverts this, placing the root cause of women's oppression in backward ideas. It does not get to the root of the problem in class society, which is part of why many bourgeois women embrace it. Feminists draws a gender line in society, seeking to unite women across class lines. They require the mutual collaboration of all women, implying, and sometimes openly asserting, that women of all social classes have similar interests, bonded by "sister-

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Protesting Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Nikki Haley at April 2017 Women of the World summit. Internationalists emphasized: bourgeois politicians, imperialist criminals are "not our sisters."

¹ Together with an extensive report on the forum, excerpts from presentations made there were published in *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Slavery and the Constitution

Origins of U.S. Capitalist “Democracy”

By James

Long ago and far away – or so it seems these days – in the B.C. era (Before Coronavirus, that is), bourgeois politics in the United States fixated briefly on impeachment. On 18 December 2019, the lower house of Congress – the House of Representatives – voted to impeach Donald Trump. On 5 February 2020, the curtain came down on a farce foretold, as the upper house of Congress – the Senate – voted to acquit him.

As we Marxists noted at the time, the Democrats leading the lower house of Congress did not, of course, impeach Donald Trump for his crimes against the oppressed, for example his “sadistic murderous cruelty against refugees at the border” and “vicious persecution of immigrants in the U.S.” After all, the record deportations under the Democratic administration that paved the way for Trump made Democratic president Barack Obama “deporter-in-chief.” Instead, they staged an electoral gambit accusing Trump of getting in the way of strategic goals of U.S. imperialism by holding up the delivery of weapons of war to a “U.S. ally” (Ukraine), in which the Democrats banked on dissatisfaction with the erratic, “soft-on-Russia” president in the military and intelligence “community.” Trump was “brought up on charges by the wrong class for the wrong crimes,” noted *The Internationalist*.¹

While Democrats charged Trump with obstruction of Congress, his backers pointed to Article II of the U.S. Constitution, claiming that it allows the president to do “whatever he wants.” In fact, the Constitution established a powerful executive, often called the “imperial presidency.” Democrats and Republicans vied to see which party of racist U.S. capitalism could pretend to be more passionate about differing “interpretations of the Constitution.” Both wielded an old political and ideological weapon: what historians call the “civic religion” that has taught one generation after another the mythology of the Constitution as an abstract embodiment of “democracy” in general, an abstract ideal akin to the Ten Commandments to be worshipped alongside the “Founding Fathers,” etc. Yet the creators of the Constitution understood very well that they represented not “the people” in general but the ruling class of planters and merchants, and wrote it to safeguard their interests.

In works like the *Communist Manifesto* (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 1847) and *State and Revolution* (V.I. Lenin, 1917) – crucial reading for all who want to do away with capitalist oppression – the founders of our movement explained that “bourgeois democracy” was a step forward compared with monarchies and the feudal aristocracy. Today, against attacks on basic democratic rights ramped

¹ “Against Trump and the Democrats – Build a Workers Party. Impeachment Crisis: ‘Deep State’ vs. Bigot-in-Chief,” *The Internationalist* No. 57, September-October 2019.



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi signs articles of impeachment against Donald Trump, January 15. “#DefendOurDemocracy” became the Democrats’ rallying cry throughout the impeachment fiasco, in which the bigot-in-chief was tried by the wrong class for the wrong crimes.

up by Democrats and Republicans in this country, Marxists are the most intransigent defenders of those rights, which were won by mass struggle. Some of them were codified in the Bill of Rights; the smashing of chattel slavery in the Civil War resulted in a number of key amendments, and women’s suffrage was finally established through the 19th Amendment.

Bourgeois democracy is a form of government administering the *capitalist state*. Quoting Engels, Lenin emphasized that the core of that state consists of the “armed bodies of men” (police, armed forces, etc.) whose function is to uphold the power and property of the ruling class – that is, to enforce the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. In “normal” times, the democratic republic is “the best possible political shell for capitalism,” in which capital “establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it” (*State and Revolution*).

But when the capitalists consider their rule to be threatened, they can sweep away all trappings of democracy, constitutions, parliaments and the rest. One only has to look at how the “democratic” German government turned power over to Hitler in 1933, or how the Chilean bourgeoisie had the “constitutional” army head Augusto Pinochet carry out a bloody coup in 1973 to establish the military dictatorship that ruled with an iron fist for 17 years.

Looking at the particular set-up of capitalist rule in the United States, the fact is that the U.S. Constitution set up a particularly *anti-democratic* institutional framework. By way of comparison, in many parliamentary systems the government can fall through a no-confidence vote by the majority of elected representatives, which would be followed by new elections. In Britain, for example, votes of no confidence have brought down 21 prime ministers since the office was established in 1742, most recently in 1979.

Abolitionists Said Constitution Was a “Covenant with Death”

Written when “We the People” meant that black people, Native Americans, women, as well as many white poor and working people were openly excluded from “democracy,” the United States Constitution still established a series of major barriers to the exercise of the vaunted “will of the people.” Taught in civics classes as the embodiment of impartial “checks and balances,” they were in fact designed, and explicitly motivated by the Constitution’s “Framers,” to protect property and wealth against the masses. Above all, key institutions were established to bolster and uphold the *power of the slaveowners* in the newly established American republic.

Slavery shaped the Constitution so flagrantly that William Lloyd Garrison, a pioneer of the abolitionist movement, called it a “covenant with death” and “an agreement with Hell.”² One of the best-known abolitionist polemics was *The Constitution A Pro-Slavery Compact* (“compact” meaning deal in the language of the day), by Wendell Phillips. Published in 1844, it called the Constitution “that ‘compromise’ ... granting to the slaveholder distinct privileges and protection for his slave property, in return for certain commercial concessions upon his part toward the North.” Phillips denounced “our fathers” (aka the Founding Fathers) for having “bartered honesty for gain,” with a Constitution that embodied the Northern elite being “partners” with the slaveholders, to “share in the profits of their tyranny.”

² See “Garrison’s Constitution: The Covenant with Death and How It Was Made,” *Prologue*, Winter 2000, online at archives.gov/publications/prologue/2000/winter/garrisons-constitution-1.html After a close association with Garrison, the great radical abolitionist Frederick Douglass broke with him; disagreement with Garrison’s adherence to pacifistic “moral suasion” came to a head when Douglass hailed the raid on Harpers Ferry that John Brown launched in October 1859 in an effort to spark a slave insurrection in the South.

This is a key reason why the U.S. Constitution established a series of institutions that are strikingly anti-democratic. They remained so even after slavery’s abolition through the Civil War and a number of modifications over the years. The same governmental framework for administering the bourgeois state – a machine of organized violence against the oppressed – continued to bolster the capitalist rulers’ power.

Of, By and For Whom?

Generations have had a lot of patriotic pabulum pounded into their heads about the figures who, supposedly guided by selfless devotion to abstract principles, wrote the nation’s charter at the Constitutional Convention, held in Philadelphia back in 1787. A good antidote is to look at how institutions enshrined in the Constitution reflect the real class forces and material interests involved.

• **The presidency.** This crowns the structure largely built to the slave owners’ measure. “For 32 of the Constitution’s first 36 years,” a “slaveholding Virginian occupied the presidency.”³ And for 50 of the 72 years up to 1860, slave owners held the office, and openly pro-slavery Northerners such as James Buchanan (known as “doughfaces”) did so the rest of the time.

The framers of the Constitution knew it wasn’t feasible to have a king, though Alexander Hamilton wanted the president to serve for life. They settled for establishing an executive branch headed by a president, to whom the Constitution gave extraordinary power. Today, that includes the power to blow up the world. The president can presently be elected to up to two four-year terms and is virtually impossible to remove from office.

• **The Electoral College.** This was established to help ensure the election of a president with what Hamilton called the “requisite qualifications,” that is, acceptable to the ruling class. In particular, though, the Electoral College boosted the power of the Southern states based centrally on slave labor. This is because the number of electoral votes assigned to each state is determined by that state’s “whole Number of Senators and Representatives,” which included slaves under the infamous 3/5ths Clause, until slavery was finally abolished through the Civil War.

In the 1800 elections, for example, “without the votes of the extra electors that resulted from the addition of three-fifths of the South’s slaves to the population calculation,” Thomas Jefferson would not have won the presidency.⁴ Jefferson, who sought to extend the Southern slaveocracy’s power to the Caribbean and beyond, was par-

³ “The Troubling Reason the Electoral College Exists,” *Time*, 26 November 2018.

⁴ Eric Foner, “The Corrupt Bargain,” *London Review of Books*, 21 May. Since the workings of the Electoral College gave the 2000 election to George W. Bush and the 2016 one to Donald Trump, despite both losing the popular vote, today Democratic liberals are unhappy with it, while continuing to portray the Constitution as virtual holy writ and the structure it set up as the incarnation of “democracy.”



Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution, which terrified U.S. slaveholders.

ticularly alarmed by the Haitian Revolution. “If this combustion can be introduced among us ... we have to fear it,” he wrote James Madison, warning against allowing news of Haitian slaves’ heroic uprising to reach the slave states of the U.S. As president, he sought to work with the European powers to seal off and strangle the black republic. Vastly expanding U.S. territory – and with it the land for slave plantations – through the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson later wrote to James Monroe (author of the Monroe Doctrine of U.S. dominance of the Western Hemisphere) with the proposal to annex Cuba, where the sugar industry was coining enormous wealth from slave labor.

• **The Supreme Court**, made up of nine black-robed dispensers of ruling-class “justice” appointed for life by the president. (The president also appoints many other federal officials, who often remain in office for decades.) Up until the Civil War, the Southern slavocracy essentially controlled the Supreme Court. For the vast majority of the antebellum period, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was a Southern slaveowner, and over half of justices throughout that 72-year period also owned slaves. Southern planter domination of the Supreme Court resulted in verdicts such as the Dred Scott decision, which ruled that residence in a free state or territory did not entitle an enslaved person to their freedom – with chief justice Roger Taney stating that black men had “no rights which the white man is bound to respect.”

By Constitutional design, the Supreme Court can stymie legislative changes; and it can roll back decisions like *Roe v. Wade*, which at least finally recognized women’s basic democratic right to abortion, under the impact of mass antiwar, black freedom and women’s rights struggles – and, above all, the victorious Vietnamese insurgents’ fight against U.S. imperialism. Yet the anti-democratic set-up of U.S. “democracy” means *Roe v. Wade* will never be safe from repeated attacks (and over the years the Democrats helped reduce abortion rights time and again). There is no possibility of democratic recall of justices or any form of popular accountability. Liberal fascination with the Supreme Court centers on waiting for one of its members to die or retire and pushing for more liberal judges, but

Marxists understand that the entire institution was formed as one more means to prevent the population from having “too much” exercise of democratic rights. As the Trotskyist press noted in 1936:

“That the Supreme Court is but one of a host of instrumentalities and principles embodied in the Constitution by its makers to thwart forever the possibility of majority rule; that the Founding Fathers had as their fundamental aim the erection of such permanent barriers; that the hostility to majority rule is, in fact, the very essence of the Constitution – such ideas are repugnant to the ruling class, which prefers to perpetuate the myth that the Constitution is a democratic document.”⁵

• **The Senate**, the upper house of Congress, with two senators per state regardless of how big or small each state’s population is. Originally elected by

state legislatures, not directly by voters, the Senate was established as a way of making extra-sure that the House of Representatives, elected on the basis of population, would not enact measures unpalatable to wealthy property owners. After all, Madison, the Virginia slave owner who wrote the first drafts of the Constitution and co-wrote the Federalist Papers, said the rights of property must be protected “against majority factions.” Virginia governor and slave owner Edmund Randolph warned the Constitutional Convention against “the turbulence and follies of democracy,” and advocated a “good Senate” to “restrain, if possible, [democracy’s] fury.” John Dickinson of Delaware, a slave owner and signer of the Constitution, said senators should be “distinguished for their rank in life and their weight of property.” No wonder the U.S. Senate came to be known as a “millionaires’ club.”

Securing “Monied Interests”

Northern framers of the Constitution had reasons of their own for backing the establishment of the Senate, with Eldridge Garry of Massachusetts highlighting the need for making “the commercial & monied interest ... secure.” Roger Sherman of Connecticut, who signed the Declaration of Independence as well as the Constitution, said the people “should have as little to do as may be about the Government.” Hamilton, one of the most far-seeing representatives of that “interest” in the North, warned his fellow Founding Fathers not to “incline too much to democracy.” Their drive for a new Constitution was partly fueled by fear of unrest among small farm-

⁵ Felix Morrow, “The Spirit of the U.S. Constitution,” *New Internationalist*, February 1936 (online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morrow-felix/1936/02/constitution.htm>). This was written in the midst of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, when the Communist Party joined mainstream Democrats in pushing liberal myths and legends about the Constitution, Washington, Jefferson, etc. Its formerly revolutionary politics destroyed by Stalinism, the CP was promoting the “popular front” line of support to FDR, even proclaiming that “Communism is 20th-Century Americanism.” Today, Democratic (Party) “socialists” like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have made a specialty of red-white-and-blue appeals to the tradition of FDR, the New Deal, etc. *ad nauseam*.

ers like those had who launched Shays’ Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786-87. Angry about poverty, foreclosures and new taxes, the rebels, many of them Revolutionary War veterans, attacked courthouses and government offices, demanding debt relief and stopping judges from holding court.

Massachusetts’ Henry Knox, a military commander during the Revolution and the future first Secretary of War, wrote George Washington in October 1786 about the rebellious farmers:

“They see the weakness of Government[,] they feel at once their own poverty compared with the opulent, and their own force, and they are determined to make use of the latter in order to remedy the former. Their creed is that the property of the United States has been protected from the confiscations of Britain by the joint exertions of all, and therefore ought to be the common property of all.... Our government must be braced, changed, or altered to secure our lives and property.”

This and similar rebellions alerted the Northern elite to the need, from their standpoint, for a more centralized government with much broader executive powers. This meant scrapping the Articles of Confederation, under which the U.S. operated from 1781 to 1789, and replacing it with a new Constitution. One of their complaints was that unicameral legislatures in the states had shown too much “weakness” toward the poor farmers, and they saw a strong national Senate, made up of men of property, as part of the “remedy” to such dangers.

The origin and nature of the Senate is connected to the ludicrously undemocratic nature of the impeachment process. A president is “impeached” when the House of Representatives brings articles of impeachment against them. But it takes a two-thirds majority of the Senate to convict and remove a president. This has occurred exactly *zero* times. Though the House of Representatives has voted in favor of impeachment on three separate occasions in U.S. history, the Senate has rejected the impeachment, voting to acquit the sitting president, every time.

The origins of the **impeachment process** date back to 14th-century England, where aristocrats were tried by their peers, i.e., other nobles. As the liberal *New Yorker* magazine noted last October:

“The House of Commons couldn’t attack the King directly because of the fiction that the King was infallible (‘perfect,’ as Donald Trump would say), so, beginning in 1376, they impeached his favorites, accusing Lord William Latimer and Richard Lyons of acting ‘falsely in order to have advantages for their own use.’ Latimer, a peer, insisted that he be tried by his peers – that is, by the House of Lords, not the House of Commons – and it was his peers who convicted him and sent him to prison. That’s why, today, the House [of Representatives] is preparing articles of impeachment against Trump, acting as his accusers, but it is the Senate that will judge his innocence or his guilt.”⁶

Capitalism and Slavery

Capitalism and Freedom, a paean to the profit system by right-wing economist Milton Friedman, has been admired by apologists for “free-market” exploitation since its

⁶ “The Invention – and Reinvention – of Impeachment,” *The New Yorker*, 21 Oct. 2019.

publication in 1962.⁷ Its title was doubtless intended, in part, as a riposte to *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), a key historical work by Trinidadian leftist Eric Williams. In fact, as Karl Marx explained, the slave trade and the system of chattel slavery played a crucial role in the onset of the capitalist era, as well as in the growth of capitalist economy internationally and in the United States specifically.

Together with his incisive analysis of the U.S. Civil War, Marx’s writings on these topics are highly relevant today for understanding the roots of racist oppression and the historical forces that shaped the society we live in. In recent years, since the 2008 depression led to growing interest in critiques of the capitalist system, leftist historians have published a number of studies further detailing just how central Southern slavery was to the rise and development of U.S. capitalism as a whole, including wealth and fortunes accumulated in the North.⁸

It was indeed “profits,” as Wendell Phillips noted back in 1844, that underlay the alliance between Northern and Southern propertied elites that gave birth to the U.S. Constitution. Both groups had come to see their interest in breaking loose from Britain in the late 1700s. Both resented new taxes levied by London. Northern merchant and commercial sectors were held back by laws forcing them to sell their goods in Britain; Southern planters like George Washington and Patrick Henry were angry at Britain for restraining westward expansion of slave plantations after the “French and Indian” War, and at their growing debts to British merchant houses.

Seeing a colony establish independence from the “mother country” and reject monarchy – which for centuries had claimed a divine right to rule – stirred hopes among many around the world inspired by Enlightenment ideals and fed up with the old order. But what America’s “Founding Fathers” sought and carried out from 1776 to 1783 (when the British conceded defeat) was a political separation from Britain, so the American propertied elites could rule the roost. Unlike the French and Haitian revolutions it helped touch off, the American Revolution was not a social revolution – and Marxists do not celebrate the Fourth of July. Instead, we recall Frederick Douglass’ 1852 speech, “What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July?”⁹ As for the national anthem, it is a star-spangled paean to racist oppression, threatening “the hiring and slave” with “the doom of the grave.”¹⁰

Though the founding elites had to use plebeian sectors to defeat the British, their own needs and outlook marked the new republic’s set-up. While the American Revolution gave an impetus to end slavery in the Northern states (by 1804, all of them had

⁷ After a U.S.-backed junta seized power in Chile in 1975, overthrowing the elected government of Salvador Allende, crushing unions and murdering thousands of leftist workers and youth, Friedman got a chance to put his idea of “freedom” into practice, devising the starvation “shock treatment” economic plan for military dictator Augusto Pinochet.

⁸ Historian Sven Beckert gives a good description of recent research in “Slavery and Capitalism,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 December 2014, online at chronicle.com/article/slavery-and-capitalism. For Karl Marx’s crucial analysis, see the Internationalist pamphlet *Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War* (2009).

⁹ You can hear the great black leftist actor Ossie Davis read it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yZD3eA2buw>

¹⁰ See “Kaepernick Protest Inspires Youth Defying Racist Repression,” *Revolution* No. 13, November 2016.

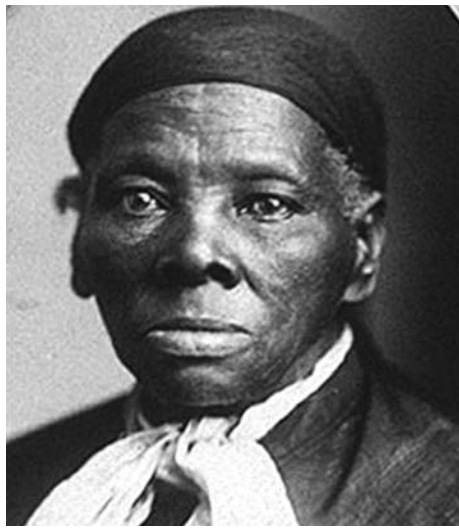
decreed its abolition), it was followed by a vast expansion of slavery for the Southern plantation owners, whose domains grew ever larger as the U.S. pushed westward through the Louisiana Purchase, “removal” and genocide against Native Americans, the acquisition of the Oregon Territory through threats of war against Britain, the creation of the Texas slave state, and then the Mexican-American War (1846-48).

In a series of letters published in a Viennese newspaper at the beginning of the Civil War, Karl Marx explained the economic and political logic of the slave system’s expansionism. Though there isn’t space to go through his points here, we would highly recommend the summary of them that is part of an in-depth article marking the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, in *The Internationalist* (No. 34, March-April 2013).¹¹ One key aspect was that the slave system’s production of cotton and other export crops was threatened due to soil depletion. As the article notes, “The slavocracy’s profits in [key] states were coming more and more from *slave raising* and the provision of slaves to other slave states. The market for slaves in the other states was limited, and so the expansion of slavery into other areas where extensive cultivation could be undertaken was imperative.” Additionally, the advance of Northern industry and population threatened to reduce the political advantages the Constitution had given the South. The slaveholders needed more slave states to maintain their political power in Washington.

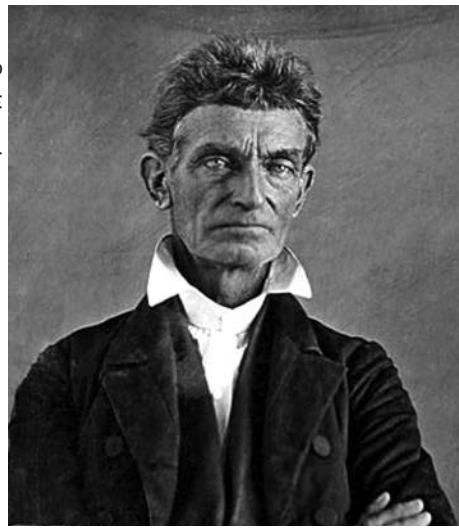
The Second American Revolution

As the U.S. expanded westward, the balance of power between the Southern slavocracy and the Northern merchants and manufacturers kept threatening to blow up. One “compromise” after another was made and then broke down. Already in 1820, leaders of the two “sections” of the U.S. put together the Missouri Compromise, stipulating that slave states and free states would be admitted to the Union in pairs. After Mexico’s abolition decree (1829) led slaveholders like Samuel Houston and Stephen Austin to carve Texas out of Mexico and bring it into the U.S., the White House staged a “border incident” to launch war on Mexico and seize half its territory. With the

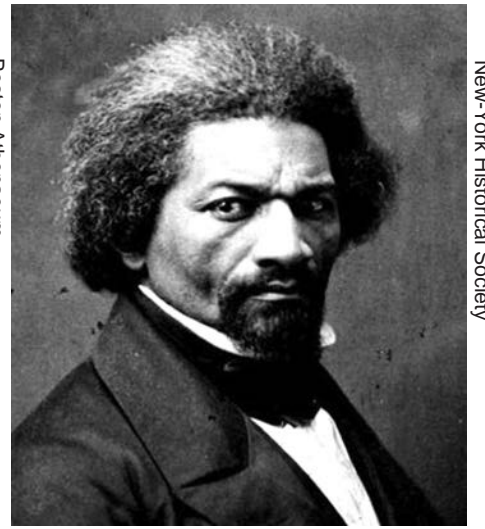
¹¹ The article, “The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal,” is available online at internationalist.org/emancipationproclamation1304.html



Smithsonian



Boston Athenaeum



New-York Historical Society

Heroic fighters for the abolition of slavery: Harriet Tubman, John Brown and Frederick Douglass.

further expansion that resulted from this war for expanding slavery, Northern and Southern politicians worked out the Compromise of 1850. The new Fugitive Slave Act it entailed was even more vicious than the one Congress had passed in 1793. 1850 also saw the infamous Dred Scott decision.

Four years later, the Kansas-Nebraska Act led to armed clashes, most famously in Kansas, where slaveholders and abolitionists poured into the state to sway the referendum on slavery. Heroic abolitionists like John Brown fought to blaze a path toward the destruction of slavery during the battles of “Bleeding Kansas” in 1856. In 1859, leading a heroic force of black and white fighters in an attack on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, in hopes of touching off a slave revolt across the South, Brown was captured by troops under the command of Robert E. Lee and J.E.B. Stuart. On the day of his execution, Brown declared himself “quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood.”

After the election of Abraham Lincoln (on a program not of abolishing slavery but of preventing its further extension), the master class of the South launched the Civil War in 1861 with the bombardment of Fort Sumter. The forces of their “Confederacy” would be commanded by the same Lee, Stuart, et al., some of whose vile statues are finally being torn down today. Like Frederick Douglass and other radical abolitionists in the U.S., Karl Marx – then writing from London – understood that the Union could not win the war without tearing out the root of the conflict: slavery. With other leaders of the “First International” (the International Working Men’s Association) and trade unionists, he helped organize workers in Britain to stop moves

by the government there to aid the South. In a famous address by the International to Lincoln in November 1864, Marx wrote:

“The working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders’ rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic.”

After one defeat after another for Union armies, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, freeing three million slaves (though not yet abolishing slavery throughout the U.S.). When black combatants were finally allowed to fight in the war, and almost 200,000 served under arms, this was crucial in the Second American Revolution that defeated the slaveholders’ rebellion and smashed the system of chattel slavery.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution (1865) formally abolished slavery throughout the U.S. It was followed by two other amendments key to the postwar Reconstruction period: the 14th (1868, giving citizenship to all those born in the U.S.) and the 15th (1870, giving black men the right to vote). However, the former slaves’ call for “forty acres and a mule” – which would have meant seizing and dividing up the plantations – was not realized, particularly after the Paris Commune of 1871, in which French workers briefly took power, heightened Northern capitalists’ fears of a general “assault on property.”

Reconstruction’s promise of black freedom was broken and sold out, a betrayal sealed by yet another “compromise” between the men of property and power in both North and South. This was the Compromise of 1877 between the former slaveholders’ Democratic Party and the Republican Party that increasingly represented the interests of Northern industrialists. As noted in “The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal”:

“The promise of black freedom was thus betrayed by the Northern bourgeoisie, which sacrificed Reconstruction on the altar of profit and ‘national reconciliation.’ The counterrevolution against Radical Reconstruction was then justified in national myth: the cause of thorough-going emancipation and racial equality was buried under layers of lies so thick that generations of schoolchildren were taught – by liberal and rightist historians alike – that Reconstruction had been a terrible mistake, and even that slavery was not the underlying issue

of the Civil War.

“The need to fight for black liberation through socialist revolution is highlighted by the fact that the betrayal of Reconstruction meant that the Southern rulers could not only rewrite the story to suit their interests, but roll back a large part of what Reconstruction had achieved, as they pushed social relations as far back as possible towards slavery-like conditions.”

For Socialist Revolution and Proletarian Democracy

Democratic (Party) “socialists” and reformists of various descriptions are forever serving up new variants of the old illusions in bourgeois democracy (“participatory democracy,” “people’s budgeting,” “radical democracy,” etc.) But a basic understanding that *every* capitalist state exists to uphold the interests of the ruling class, and a look at the specific governmental forms through which the bourgeois state is administered in the U.S., highlight Marx’s point that the working class cannot “lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.”

Revolutionaries explain the need for a revolutionary workers party to lead a socialist revolution to *overthrow the entire capitalist system*. This means establishing a workers state (what Marx called the dictatorship of the proletariat). Based on the experience of the Paris Commune and the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky, we advocate that the *proletarian* democracy of a workers state rest on workers councils. These were the “soviets” that took power in Russia (before capitalist encirclement and invasion by over a dozen countries, including the U.S. under ultra-racist Democrat Woodrow Wilson, led to the degeneration of the Soviet workers state and the rise of Stalin’s conservative bureaucracy).

The U.S. Constitution was created to represent the interests of the American ruling class, whose interests have always been opposed to those of the workers and oppressed. For this vast majority, workers rule will be a thousand times more democratic than any capitalist state. Yet as Marx and Lenin argued, international socialist revolution will lay the basis for a classless and stateless society: socialism. With the use of technology and the productive forces providing plenty for all while radically cutting time needed for labor, this will pave the way for communism. Curious about outlived class societies of the past, future students will doubtless learn many things about the final phase of capitalist barbarity when they study the reactionary U.S. Constitution in museums of capitalist antiquities. ■

Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper

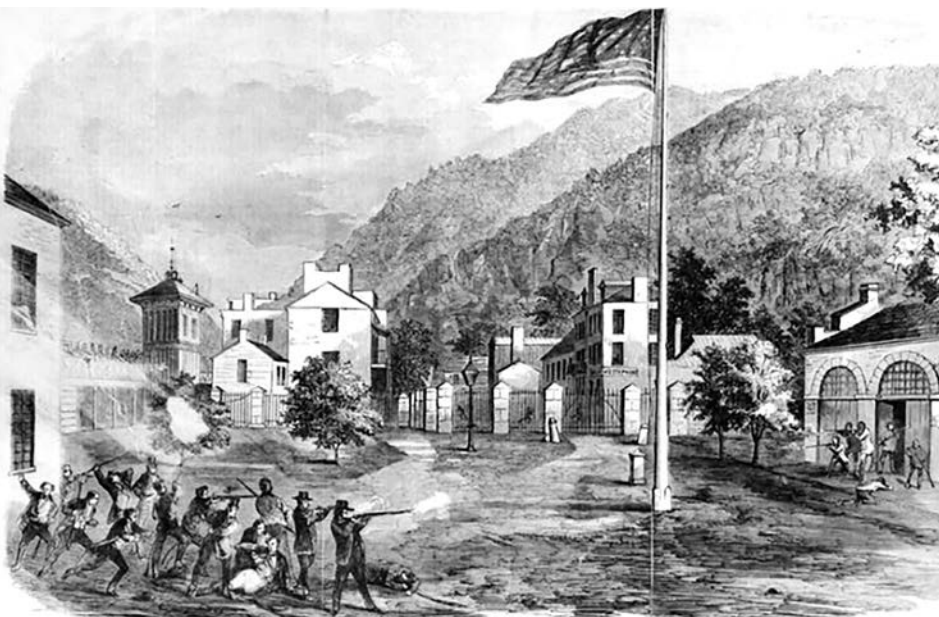


Illustration of John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry, prelude to the Civil War, which Marxists also call the Second American Revolution.

Afghanistan...

continued from page 11

in Indochina showed a basic fact: the U.S. government *lies all the time*. In the aftermath, imperialist politicians and strategists worried that Washington's global power, and preparation for future wars, were hampered by what came to be known as the "Vietnam Syndrome" – that is, massive domestic aversion to overseas military adventures involving large numbers of U.S. troops.

In 1991, at the end of his "Desert Slaughter" war on Iraq, George Bush I proclaimed: "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." Not so. A decade later in 2001, George Bush II hoped it would be overcome when he seized on the September 11 attacks to launch the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and a new "Desert Slaughter" in Iraq, which was on his infamous "axis of evil" list. This was sold with the lie of "WMD" – that Saddam Hussein's government was supposedly stockpiling "weapons of mass destruction" – a blatant fabrication loyally parroted by the bourgeois press, and especially by the *New York Times*. In Afghanistan the U.S. government proclaimed that war against Islamist forces, that it had in large part promoted and armed as anti-Soviet "freedom fighters," was part of a global "War on Terror." In reality, it was yet another war of imperialist terror for world domination by the U.S. capitalist ruling class.

Yet U.S. rulers and their propagandists continued to be haunted by the Vietnam syndrome. In 2009, a year after Obama's election, "The Incurable Vietnam Syndrome" was the title of a column by neoconservative pundit Max Boot (cbsnews.com, 14 October 2009). Boot – a warmonger in the most literal sense – bemoaned the "incalculable damage to America's standing in the world" caused by the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, grotesquely stating that this was due to the imperialists, who made *napalm* a household word, losing the "willpower" to win in Vietnam.

Urging Obama to "make a serious and prolonged commitment" to the war, Boot praised the "careful, on-the-ground review" of the Afghanistan war by U.S. commander Gen. Stanley McChrystal. Today, unsurprisingly, the Afghanistan Papers show in detail that McChrystal was one of the main promoters of lies and deception in the service of this dirty colonial war. Meanwhile, Boot went on to endorse Hillary Clinton for president in 2016 and is lionized by liberals today as he decries Trump as insufficiently tough on Russia and an impediment to "America acting as a world leader."

To Put Murder Inc. Out of Business

Chiming in with Democratic liberals to proclaim that "peace is patriotic," reformist left groups constantly raise chants like "Money for schools, not for war." Exemplifying what Marxists call "social-patriotism," this promotes the idea that slaughtering oppressed people abroad is just too expensive and U.S. imperialism should change its priorities, as the money would be better spent here "at home." In contrast, revolutionaries stand for *proletarian internationalism*, in solidarity with

workers and peasants under the gun of "our own" imperialist government, and to wage class war against imperialist war.

As Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin emphasized in key works like *Socialism and War* (1915), Marxists and class-conscious workers must stand for the *defeat* of "their own" imperialist rulers and the *defense* of colonial and semicolonial countries targeted in their wars. At the same time, Marxists give no political support to the bourgeois governments of those countries; instead, the working class must fight for its own revolutionary governments there and throughout the world.

In the bourgeois press, the Afghanistan Papers are regarded as either revealing nothing of importance, or as being a totally new revelation. The truth lies somewhere in between. Even at the beginning of Bush's "Operation Enduring Freedom," as his spin doctors dubbed the imperialist war on Afghanistan, some reporters asked if the U.S. was sinking into a "quagmire," as, decades previously, many in the media had come to call the war in Vietnam. So at a press conference in November 2001, uber-cynical war secretary Rumsfeld asked the roomful of reporters to join in: "All together now – quagmire!" (Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* [2004]).

Today, a headline in the London *Guardian* (9 December 2019) encapsulates the liberal line: "Afghanistan papers reveal US public misled about unwinnable war." Here again the "failures" of the imperialists' war add up to its being "unwinnable," while bourgeois liberals cover over war's criminal, imperialist purposes, rooted in the fact that imperialism is not a mistaken policy but the system of capitalism in its blood-drenched death spiral.

Though many of the realities of U.S. imperialism's war in Afghanistan have been known for years, the Afghanistan Papers do expose the all-sided duplicity of the bourgeois politicians and military elite, who routinely and continuously lie as part of the bloody, bipartisan business-as-usual of capitalist rule. As they rain death and destruction on the peoples of the world, they must seek continuously to hide the truth from the population "at home" that they claim, with the red-white-and-blue rhetoric of deception, to "represent."

What the Afghanistan Papers do not do is seek to bring to light the bloody nature of imperialism, exposing the daily crimes and barbaric cruelties committed by the U.S. against its victims. The WikiLeaks revelations of 2010 did both.

Yet despite these hundreds of thousands of documents that have made their way to the public, there is still so much more to know – we have not even scratched the surface of U.S. imperialism's crimes. It was not until after the Russian Revolution of 1917 that the imperialist powers' secret treaties to re-divide the world through the first imperialist World War were revealed. Just two weeks after leading the victorious workers insurrection, Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik government's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, published them for the whole world to see. And it will take nothing less than a socialist revolution in the U.S. to bring to light all the crimes of the imperialists, and ultimately bring their perpetrators to justice. Only world-wide workers revolution can put an end to imperialist war. ■



Fifty thousand Bangladeshi women garment workers on strike, January 2019. Workers producing garments for H&M, Walmart, Tesco and Aldi walked out demanding higher wages, affecting over 4,500 textile and clothing factories. Police responded with rubber bullets and tear gas, killing at least one striking worker. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, another capitalist "boss lady," does imperialism's dirty work in siccing police on strikers.

Feminism or...

continued from page 14

hood," and should unite on that basis. This program of class collaboration is counterposed to winning women's liberation.

Daily real life and history have proven time and again that working-class women *do not* have the same interests as ruling-class women. The boss is not and cannot be the "sister" of the women worker – that idea helps the capitalist and harms the struggle of those he or she exploits. A female garment worker in the sweatshops of Bangladesh, who on average earns about \$33 per month,² will never have the same interests as the bourgeois women who own, or whose families own, those sweatshops, and who profit from their exploitation. The women working in these factories, who are doubly oppressed, facing both gender and class oppression, have more in common with their working-class brothers than they will ever have with the bourgeois women subjugating them both. The task of women's liberation is that of the working class as a whole, and one revolutionaries must win them to, to bring workers power into this fight as part of the struggle for the workers to take over internationally, opening the way for a classless society that can eliminate all forms of oppression.

Feminism ultimately reflects the outlook of bourgeois women seeking the same advantages and power enjoyed by bourgeois men. They seek this kind of equality (for themselves) within the existing social framework of capitalism. Marxists oppose any discrimination based on gender within capitalist society (yes, including if it affects women who are not part of the exploited class) – but being genuinely radical aim to smash the system that gives rise to that discrimination and to women's oppression in general. Thus, as I continued to work with RIY, I learned that the struggle for women's liberation is inextricably linked to the struggle for working-class liberation. Therefore, to effectively fight against women's oppression requires a break with feminism, which obscures the root of women's oppression and seeks to tie working women to their bourgeois "sisters."

I now understood the root of my

² See "Sweatshops in Bangladesh" at <https://waronwant.org/sweatshops-bangladesh>.

own experiences with women's oppression growing up. The fight for women's liberation first became important to me because of my personal experiences with being treated unfairly due to my gender. Studying the history of the revolutionary movement and the basis of the Marxist program, I learned that all forms of special oppression – of women, of black people, of immigrants, of gay and transgender people, etc. – are rooted in class society, and that the struggle against it is a class struggle.

A word is in order here on "identity politics." To believe that an effective fight against oppression rooted in capitalism comes from uniting all those with a common "identity" based on gender is an example of this outlook, which college students are literally trained in. As RIY's founding statement points out, this ideology advances political objectives counterposed to a genuine fight for liberation, serving as "a glue for 'unity' with Democratic Party politicians" while it "feigns a fight against oppression through 'check-your-privilege' liberal idealism...."³

This account has focused on the topic of women's oppression, which is what first politicized me; this is one facet of what led me to join the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth. Many other issues have been key in my political development as well. Among them are the fight for black liberation, our call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants and the intensive work that the Internationalist Group, RIY and Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (Class Struggle International Workers) carry out among immigrant workers and youth. Of particular importance is Trotsky's program of permanent revolution. It is key for South Asia, for all formerly colonized regions, and for the countries and peoples crushed down by imperialism and the local ruling classes today.

It took some time for me to break with feminism and come over to revolutionary Marxism, and my political consciousness kept sharpening in the process. Women's liberation can only be achieved through socialist revolution, and as a member of RIY that is exactly what I am fighting for. ■

³ "Revolutionary Internationalist Youth Found," *Revolution* No. 14, January 2018.

Herding Votes for Biden, Pushing *More* Cash for Cops Like We Said: Bernie Sanders’ “Political Revolution” Was a Scam

By Jacob

Bernie Sanders is at it yet again. With populist bluster about a “political revolution against the billionaire class,” the senator from Vermont who calls himself a democratic socialist drew wide support from youth disenchanted by capitalism’s escalating crises. His foot soldiers revved them up, registered them as Democrats and lined them up for the November 2020 vote. In April, Sanders dropped out of the primaries, throwing his weight behind the embodiment of the “Democratic establishment” his followers had reviled: Joe Biden. Like we said from the beginning: Sanders’ so-called political revolution was and always has been a political scam, in the service of the Democrats.

So now Bernie Sanders proclaims that Joe Biden could be the “most progressive president” since Franklin D. Roosevelt. This PR pitch came after the “Unity Task Forces,” which the presumptive Democratic nominee and Bernie’s team set up in May, released policy recommendations for a Biden presidency. Coming from Sanders, this was high praise indeed. Like his ally Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who snagged a prized post as co-chair of Biden’s climate taskforce, Sanders holds up Democratic imperialist icon FDR and his New Deal as a model and inspiration. In fact, Sanders explains “democratic socialism” as a continuation of FDR’s New Deal.¹

The comparison is telling. Roosevelt’s “New Deal coalition” was instrumental in chaining labor, African Americans, Latinos and would-be leftists to the Democratic Party’s machinery for administering the capitalist system of exploitation, imperialism and racist repression. Today, Bernie, AOC and other “progressives” are working overtime to reinforce those chains. That they’re doing this in tandem with Biden, Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer et al. has upset some of Sanders’ followers. But in fact, he always stated explicitly that he would throw his weight behind whoever the Democrats wound up nominating.

Thus “socialist” Sanders praising Joe “shoot ‘em in the leg” Biden² is the closing act in his “political revolution,” a drama that was always meant to bolster a largely discredited Democratic Party with the votes of the young and discontented. As revolutionary Marxists, we have highlighted this from the beginning. This has meant stating forthrightly that far from any kind of revolution, Sanders’ campaign has been an effort to update the timeworn

¹ Mainstream media have noted this in articles such as “Bernie Sanders’s New Deal Socialism,” *The New Yorker*, 20 November 2015; “Bernie Sanders: ‘Democratic Socialist’ Is Just a Synonym for New Deal Liberal,” *New York Magazine*, 23 April 2019; “Bernie Sanders Pitches ‘Democratic Socialism’ as Next Stage of FDR’s New Deal,” *HuffPost*, 12 June 2019, etc.

² A week after the police murder of George Floyd, in a speech to Wilmington, Delaware African American community leaders, Biden said cops should be trained to shoot people “in the leg instead of the heart.”



Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders embrace at February 7 Democratic presidential primary debate in New Hampshire.

mechanisms of capitalist electoral politics, to make them more effective at deceiving the exploited and oppressed. “No, Bernie Sanders Is Not a Socialist,” we insisted (*Revolution* No. 12, March 2016).³ Telling it like it is – which is the first duty of Marxists, who fight for a workers revolution to overthrow the capitalist order – contrasts sharply with the pretexts and gimmicks that reformist groups cooked up to justify their quest to cash in on Bernie-mania. To help peddle imperialist Democratic liberalism as supposedly some kind of socialism was, we pointed out, a textbook example of what Marx and Lenin called *opportunism*.

Beating the Drums for the Party of Hiroshima and Vietnam War

It’s never been a secret: “What I am trying to do is revitalize the Democratic Party, bring in the young people, bring in the working people,” Sanders told ABC News (27 November 2017). Time and again, he has reiterated this objective, in the service of U.S. imperialism’s oldest and most trusted political party, responsible for waging one U.S. war after another.

As we emphasized in an in-depth article explaining “No, Bernie Sander is *Not* a Socialist” (*Revolution* No. 12, March 2016): “The political function of Bernie Sanders’ campaign is not to sharpen the struggle against capitalist reaction but to blur consciousness and lead those increasingly fed up with the status quo back into supporting the Democratic Party of war, racism and police terror.”

Against illusions in Democratic (Party) “Socialists,” we wrote in the same article:

“The Democratic Party is and has always been a machine for subjugating the working people and oppressed to the capitalist class, going back to the party’s origins as the party of slavery, then Jim Crow. Its crimes include boundless oppression against the peoples of Latin

³ This article is reprinted in the Internationalist Group pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (2018), together with key materials on the real nature and history of “democratic socialism” and its services to U.S. imperialism.

America, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, imperialism’s genocidal war against the people of Vietnam....”

Today, Sanders stumping for Biden, the godfather of mass incarceration, should come as no surprise. It was only a matter of time. He said all along he’d work for the eventual Democratic nominee. Four years ago, he did the same, for Barack Obama’s war-hawk secretary of state. “I did my best to see that Hillary Clinton get elected,” Sanders told CNN (10 November 2016). In the lead-up to election day, he herded votes for her in 21 rallies, by his count. In the same interview, the “socialist” (sic!) senator segued into vowing: “I intend to work with President Trump on those issues where he will, in fact, work for the middle class and working families in this country.” As we have noted since the beginning, Sanders is a *bourgeois politician* – and all this comes with the territory of bourgeois politics.

Quite a few young people who thought supporting Sanders had something to do with “socialism” – or might at least improve things under capitalism – balk at backing Biden. One function of the Biden/Sanders Unity Task Forces was to mobilize up-and-coming “progressives” and members of the Bernie team to overcome such doubts and hesitations. The objective: firmly refastening the shackles of subjugation to capitalism’s Democratic Party. Joining Ocasio-Cortez et al. in this task are the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA, of which AOC is a member), the *Jacobin* magazine crew (intellectual technicians for packaging capitalist politics as “socialism”), and many others. To youth who may suspect they have been swindled, the message is, in effect: Nothing to see here, move on – onward to November.

Yet under the impact of U.S. capitalism’s triple pandemic of racist police terror, coronavirus and economic devastation, many workers and youth are increasingly open to radical politics. Berned once, Berned twice, some of those who supported Sanders feel conned (which they were). And despite intensive efforts by Democrats and their left assistants to channel protesters against police terror into illusory Democratic schemes to “reform”/“defund” capitalism’s police, determined opponents of racism want to get to the root of systemic oppression. Marxism is essential for doing this, and for showing the link between effective struggle to uproot racism and the fight to unchain the power of the working class and oppressed from the Democratic Party.

Sanders’ political record is littered with examples of how he has worked to uphold the interests of U.S. imperialism. He voted to support U.S. wars and interventions in Yugoslavia (in 1998 and 1999), Somalia (in 1993), Libya (in 2011) and Afghanistan (in 2001). He voted against the Iraq war in 2004 – and then voted to fund it in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2013. In fact, as far back as 1998 Sanders voted for the “Iraq Liberation Act,” the regime-change measure that helped pave the way for the imperialist carnage. He voted for the 1994 Omnibus Crime Bill, written by Joe Biden and signed into law by Bill Clinton, which ramped up the mass incarceration system, and for the USA Freedom Act, which renewed and expanded government domestic spying.

Sanders said he “held [his] nose” and voted funds for Trump’s border wall (*CNN*, 24 June 2018), arguing that this was in exchange for tenuous protections for some undocumented immigrants. He said “we have to protect the dreamers,” as he backed a bill that would prohibit them



Bernie Sanders endorses Hillary Clinton at meeting in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 12 July 2016.

from sponsoring their parents for legal status. He sang the praises of deceased war criminals John McCain and George H.W. Bush. He gave “progressive” cover to the U.S.-backed coup attempt in Venezuela (which fellow “democratic socialists” Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib voted \$20 million to support), calling on Venezuela to let in U.S. arms shipments masquerading as “humanitarian aid.”

We Told the Truth About It

When Sanders conceded in April, the response from prominent campaign stalwarts was that the “movement” is “Bigger Than Bernie” (title of a book by *Jacobin* apparatchiks Meagan Day and Micah Uetricht). But as we have said from the beginning, this “movement” is a move deeper and deeper into the Democratic Party.

Genuine socialists do not support candidates of capitalist parties, let alone one responsible for as much death and destruction as the imperialist Democratic Party. “Left” Bernie backers tend to shrug all this off and mutter “well, nobody’s perfect.” Yet opposition to the militarism of the ruling class and its terrorization of our working-class brothers and sisters abroad is not some kind of bargaining chip. Nor are the rights of immigrants and refugees who enter the U.S. fleeing destruction and poverty made in U.S.A. As Marxists we fight for international socialist revolution. Part of that struggle means fighting for the defeat of “our own” imperialist ruling class.

So who told the truth about the Bernie Sanders campaigns for the 2016 and 2020 Democratic nominations?

“The pretensions of Bernie Sanders to be a leftist, let alone a socialist, are a joke. His cheerleaders of the pseudo-left may present him as a friend of ‘working folks,’ but the real record of the Vermont senator is no laughing matter. As a ‘critical’ voice of support to U.S. imperialism, Sanders is an enemy of workers and the oppressed world-wide.... If donkeys could fly, pressure would transform the likes of Bernie Sanders into the opposite of what he is: a capitalist Democratic politician.... Generating illusions in the Democratic campaign of Bernie Sanders is just the most recent embodiment of the policy followed by generations of leftists in the United States who have helped channel discontent and disillusionment back into capitalist politics.”

– “Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left,” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015

That was from the year before Sand-

ers lost the Democratic nomination the first time around. Endorsing Hillary Clinton, in line with his promises, he then went on to say: “I also look forward to working with Secretary Clinton to transform the Democratic Party” (*The Atlantic*, 16 June 2016).

Today, Bernie is playing the same role as in 2016, as he coaches Biden on how best to pander to his disappointed supporters:

“I think what Joe is gonna have to do – and he’s beginning to move in that direction – is to say to those working class people, say to those young people, say to those minorities, ‘Listen, I understand your situation’.” – “Sanders says his supporters will vote for Biden but he needs to court them,” *The Guardian*, 17 May 2020

Despite claims made by some self-proclaimed socialists that the Bernie campaign would create the “momentum” to eventually give way to a break from the Democrats, the opposite has happened. As large numbers of young Bernie supporters joined the DSA, they (and left groups tailing them) were led *deeper* into Democratic Party politics. DSA-promoted candidates like Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib became stars in the Democratic firmament. Even before winning a second term in her Congressional district, AOC is moving into the big leagues with her inclusion in Biden’s campaign brain trust.

Opportunist left groups have provided different rationales for why they tailed Bernie. The now-defunct International Socialist Organization gushed about Bernie having put “socialism in the air.” The “International Marxist Tendency” urged the veteran imperialist politician to run as an independent and help form a “mass socialist party.” Socialist Alternative took it a step further, organizing a “Movement4Bernie” to help channel youth into his campaign.

At the same time as it sought to promote a revolutionary image of itself, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) worked to aid the Sanders campaign. “Although we are not Democrats, we encourage those voting in the upcoming Democratic Party primaries to vote for Bernie Sanders,” the PSL wrote in its newspaper *Liberation* (4 February). That’s a little like saying: for all those drinking the Kool-Aid, though of course we don’t, we recommend the Sanders Blast flavor. Characterizing his campaign as a “vessel for a progressive, vaguely socialist insurgency within the confines of the Democratic Party,” they went on in the same article to promise: “If Bernie Sanders wins the Democratic nomination ... the PSL will not run candidates in battleground swing states.”

What Sanders Calls “Democratic Socialism”

“The truth is,” Sanders told CBS News (25 February), “nothing I am saying is radical” (though many leftists kept claiming it was). Liberal economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman penned an op-ed during the primaries explaining:

“Bernie Sanders isn’t actually a socialist in any normal sense of the term. He doesn’t want to nationalize our major industries and replace markets with central planning.... He’s basically what Europeans would call a social democrat.... So why does Sanders call himself a socialist? I’d say that it’s mainly about personal branding, with a dash of glee at shocking the bourgeoisie.”

– “Bernie Sanders Isn’t a Socialist,” *New York Times*, 13 February

Bernie’s and AOC’s evocation of the New Deal and their calls for the Demo-



Office of the Attorney General of California

Kamala Harris (in police jacket), then the California Attorney General, pictured with Border Patrol agents at U.S.-Mexico border fence in 2011. As Biden has now chosen the former California top cop as his running mate, Sanders will be herding votes for her too.

cratic Party to live up to its heritage as the party of FDR, the commander-in-chief who interned Japanese Americans in detention camps and waged imperialist war with a Jim Crow army, highlight the point that their “democratic socialism” is nothing more than Democratic Party liberalism.

In line with this, the Kennedy clan looms large, as in the case of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. A feature article in the *New Yorker* (23 July 2018) by the magazine’s editor noted that she worked in Edward Kennedy’s Boston office while attending university. “When I asked her about her political heroes,” she “named Robert F. Kennedy. In college, reading his speeches – ‘that was my jam,’ she said.” As the Internationalist press noted:

“RFK is the guy who bugged Martin Luther King’s phones, waged a union-busting campaign against the Teamsters, and tried to wipe out the Cuban Revolution with big brother JFK, from the Bay of Pigs to threatening to blow up the world in the Cuban Missile Crisis, to launching endless attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.”

– “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018

A mainstream magazine aimed at millennials, *Quartz* (29 October 2015), took it to a logical though absurd extreme in a piece titled “If elected, Bernie Sanders wouldn’t be America’s first socialist president.” Their ridiculous claim is that public services, social welfare programs, etc. are all “socialist” parts of a capitalist economy. (At Hunter College, some Sanders campaigners handed out post cards pushing the same idea.) In addition to FDR and John F. Kennedy, they cite Harry Truman, who twice dropped the atom bomb on Japanese civilians (in Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and led the genocidal U.S. war in Korea.

An image widely circulated on the internet in 2016, titled “Democratic Socialist Presidents of the United States,” based on the same claims, shows where this kind of “malarkey” (to use one of Joe Biden’s favorite words) can lead. It depicts Bernie in a line of presidents including FDR; Lyndon B. Johnson, who rained bombs, napalm and Agent Orange on the people of Vietnam; and Dwight D. Eisenhower, whose administration overthrew the governments of Iran, Guatemala and the Congo to back up U.S. imperialist interests. For good measure, it throws in Theodore Roosevelt, the colonialist racist who oversaw the U.S.

counterinsurgency war of mass murder in the Philippines.

Cops = “Socialism”? Hell No!

Democratic politicians have been working overtime to placate protests against racist police terror with illusory schemes to “reform” the police. The one that has gained the most traction is the slogan of “defunding” the police (by which they mean reducing their budget, or claiming to do so). Thus, Democrats call to “shuffle some of that money around,” in Nancy Pelosi’s words (MSNBC, 8 June). Yet a cheaper nightstick will still crack a skull. Some reformists even promote the illusion that the ruling class might dissolve its own repressive forces. This fantasy can only politically disarm the exploited and oppressed in the face of a ruthless enemy. Racist terror is intrinsic to American capitalism and only revolution can bring justice.

On the question of the police, Sanders has actually marked himself off from some “progressive” Democrats by coming out against “defunding” in favor of *increasing* funding for the cops.

Bernie Sanders was endorsed by the cop “union” in Burlington, Vermont when he ran for mayor, winning the position in 1981. But even if you didn’t know that, we’ve all heard Bernie’s standard campaign trail refrain many a time: “When you go to your public library, when you call your Fire Department or the Police Department, what do you think you’re calling? ... These are socialist institutions” (*New York Times*, 19 October 2015).

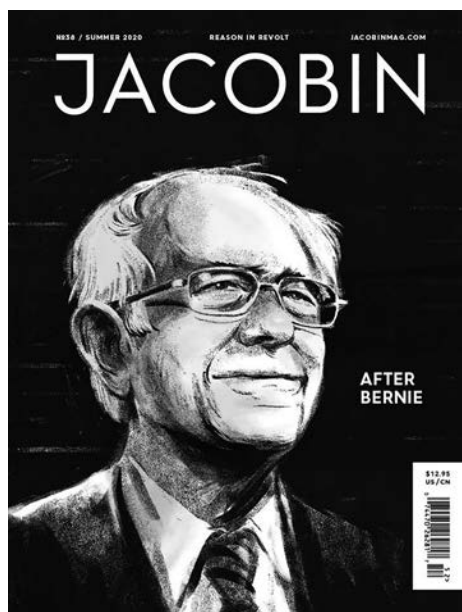
Hell no. The police are the armed fist of the capitalist state, terrorizing black and brown people on a daily basis, breaking strikes and escorting scabs (strikebreakers) across picket lines, as has been the case ever since the union movement started. We call to oust the police and their “unions” from the labor movement, for labor/black/immigrant mobilization against racist attacks and to stop deportations, and for workers strikes against racist cop terror.

Political Independence of the Working Class

Key to all of this is the basic Marxist principle that to defend its most basic rights and interests, and use its power to uproot all forms of oppression, the working class must win its own political independence, against the parties, politicians and institu-

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Revolution



Mourning in America for *Jacobin* & Co. after Biden beat out Bernie.

Resignation from the International “Marxist” Tendency

Real Marxists Don’t Support Police and Prison-Guard “Unions”

We reprint below excerpts from the letter of resignation from the reformist “International Marxist Tendency” (IMT) by comrade James B., who joined the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth in 2019 after waging a principled political fight to uphold the fundamental Marxist principles of working-class independence and for an authentically revolutionary program. His letter, along with other documents pertaining to this struggle, were published in the Internationalist Group pamphlet Left Reformists in Existential Crisis (June 2019).

As comrades know, over the past period I have questioned and opposed the IMT’s support to police and prison-guard “unions” and “strikes”; its innumerable calls on Bernie Sanders, a bourgeois politician, to form a “mass socialist party”; entry into and political support for bourgeois parties in Mexico, Bolivia, Pakistan and other countries, etc. – positions that clash with and contradict the stated Marxist goals and principles that led me to join.

The common thread that unites such positions is blurring and in fact erasing the *class line* dividing Marxist, working-class politics and the class interests of the workers and oppressed from bourgeois politics, bourgeois parties and politicians, and the

institutions of bourgeois rule. Misusing dialectics in a way that mystifies real struggles instead of clarifying the underlying issues, arguments are continually raised that in practice deny that the class line is fundamental to Marxist politics.

We are repeatedly faced with arguments that it is “sectarian” to see that the police, or capitalist politicians like Sanders, or bourgeois parties like [Mexico’s president] López Obrador’s MORENA, etc., have a given class character. The fact remains that they do. Obscuring this can only mean misleading the working class. The catastrophic results that blurring the class line on such fundamental questions can have for the working class have been shown over and over – as in Chile in 1973, to mention just one example.

Program is not only a written document with that name, but what an organization fights for and against in practice. Yet returning to the question of the formal written program itself, here too a series of reformist formulations (such as “Cut the military budget and invest instead in social needs,” “make the rich pay for the crisis,” “public ownership,” “Nationalize the Fortune 500,” etc.) are far from the insistence by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky on the need to smash the bourgeois state in a proletarian revolution

that expropriates the entire bourgeoisie, establishing a workers state based on workers councils. Learning more about the history of the tendency, I believe this is closely linked to Militant’s famous call for a Parliamentary “Enabling Bill” making possible a “peaceful socialist transition.”

Lastly, I would like to return to the question of the police and prison guards. Here the question of the armed fist of the bourgeois state is as concrete and clear as can be. This cannot be wished away through the kind of speculative “what if?” mystification that has been used. At the last aggregate, I urged comrades to read the section explaining the Marxist position, on the basis of the mass Trotskyist-led strikes right here in Minneapolis, in Farrell Dobbs’ *Teamster Rebellion*. I would strongly urge comrades to read that entire part of the book, which is in chapter 10 (“Bloody Friday”) and is as unequivocal as can be. To quote just one passage:

“Under capitalism the main police function is to break strikes and to repress other forms of protest against the policies of the ruling class.... Personal inclinations of individual cops do not alter this basic role of the police. All must comply with ruling-class dictates. As a result, police repression becomes one of the most naked forms

through which capitalism subordinates human rights to the demands of private property. If the cops sometimes falter in their antisocial tasks, it is simply because they – like the guns they use – are subject to rust when not engaged in the deadly function for which they are primarily trained.”

We also discussed the IMT’s enthusiastic support for the Alberta prison guards’ “strike.” I cited material showing concretely what prison guards “strike” for, which is to be better able to, better paid for and have better conditions for carrying out their job of brutal repression against the prisoners. (With regard to police “unions,” a range of recent exposés have detailed how their contracts work to “shield officers from scrutiny” when they brutalize, intimidate or even kill people; see for example the special Reuters report “Protecting the Blue,” January 13, 2017).

During the discussion, I stated the obvious: you cannot be in “solidarity” with prison guards and at the same time with prisoners; with the professionals of racist repression and those who it is their job to repress, arrest, handcuff, chain, jail, lock down, strip search, beat and brutalize. You cannot have it both ways. Here too the question is, Which side are you on? You

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IMT Supporters Dodge Debate

We publish below an email exchange between the Hunter Internationalist Club and Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution, the International Marxist Tendency’s (IMT) campus club, from September 2019. Since then, the IMT has published a lengthy polemic against our tendency in their publication, Socialist Revolution, upholding their grotesque line on the cops.

Debate Challenge Presented to IMT Supporters

3 September 2019

To: Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution/IMT

From: The Hunter Internationalist Club

Subject: Debate: “The Meaning of Socialism, Revolution and Marxism Today”

The Hunter Internationalist Club challenges the Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution/IMT to a public debate on campus, at the earliest opportunity, on the topic “The Meaning of Socialism, Revolution and Marxism Today.”

Speakers for each side would have equal time; there would be a chairperson acceptable to both sides; and a discussion period for questions and comments from the audience.

Please give a response by Tuesday, September 17th.

Signed,
Jacob Kaye and Kaitlan Russell
For the Internationalist Club

Rejecting Debate

17 September 2019

To: Hunter Internationalist Club

From: Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution/IMT

August 2020

Students for Socialist Revolution rejects the “request to debate” from the IG due to its long history of distorting our positions and disrupting our activities and those of our affiliates. This makes us believe that fair treatment in the discussion will be impossible. The IG’s method is entirely dishonest, for example, when they published email exchanges we had with a former member (James B.) – while conveniently and selectively redacting relevant parts in order to falsely paint the IMT as “bureaucratic.” Instead of clarifying political positions dialectically, the IG sets up strawman arguments, quotes selectively and out of context, and applies rigid categories to living processes. It is said that a fool can raise more questions in an hour than a wise man can answer in 10 years – and this is the case here. Any discussion on that basis is entirely unproductive and does not raise anyone’s level of understanding. Our time is better served by our regular activities.

Students for Socialist Revolution is wholeheartedly interested in an honest debate of ideas as part of the fight against the capitalists and their politicians. Anyone interested in our ideas, perspectives, and strategies to bring about revolutionary change is welcome to attend our events, read our literature and website, and to arrange personal discussions about any and all political, historical, and theoretical questions.

Our Response

21 September 2019

To: Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution/IMT

From: The Hunter Internationalist Club

We have received your email of 17 September. It is unfortunate, though not surprising, that you have refused our challenge to a public debate on campus. It would have been an excellent opportunity for Hunter students interested in socialist politics to see for themselves and to help clarify the real differences between our two organizations. It is said that he who seeks to dodge a debate may try to impress and distract people with deep-sounding proverbs about fools, wise men or what have you – but this is unlikely to work very well with students who want to understand important political issues and differences.

Of course, if the IMT and Hunter Students for Socialist Revolution were really convinced of the claims made in your email, the debate would have been an ideal setting for you to supposedly set the record straight and defend your views before an audience of interested students. In reality, they are pretexts to avoid having to defend IMT positions such as:

- Support to police and prison-guard “unions” and “strikes,” calling for “unity” between the workers movement and these representatives of the armed fist of the capitalist state.
- Calling on capitalist politician Bernie Sanders to “build a mass socialist party of the working class”; spreading illusions in Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others bourgeois politicians who seek to rope discontented workers and youth into the fold of the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world.

- Building illusions in and calling to vote for the current president of Mexico, bourgeois populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador. AMLO has created a new “national guard” militarized police force and mobilized it to assault migrants and refugees and prevent entry into the U.S. at the bidding of Trump.

These political positions and others held by the IMT are the opposite of revolutionary Marxism. This cannot be obscured by blatantly false claims such as that we have supposedly “disrupted” IMT events, which we have never done; we stand for workers democracy. As for the equally blatant attempt to dismiss the powerful political exposure of IMT positions in the correspondence reprinted in the *Left Reformists in Existential Crisis* pamphlet by claiming it was edited in some supposedly “dishonest” way: publish the correspondence yourselves so that readers can judge for themselves.

Your letter boils down to arguing that because you have big disagreements with us you refuse to debate. But the entire Marxist tradition shows that polemics and debate over political differences is key to the struggle for political clarity. Since you have refused the debate challenge, we will provide you 10 minutes to put forward your positions and defend them publicly at our forum on 26 September on “Socialism: What it Is (and Isn’t).”¹

Fraternally,

Jacob Kaye and Kaitlan Russell
For the Internationalist Club

¹ [Editor’s note: No surprise, the IMT dodged doing that too.]

Millennials, Gen Z...

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cans and Latinos.³

Overall, from 1974 to 2019, the median income of 25- to 34-year-olds increased by just \$29 (in 2017 dollars). As a point of comparison, in that same time period the median house price increased by \$127,862 (39%). And “let’s not even get into healthcare costs,” wrote SuperMoney (13 September 2019).

Then COVID-19 hit. The hospitality and leisure industries, which draw the majority of their workforce from millennials and Gen Zers, ground to a halt overnight.⁴ Especially for those working in the restaurant industry, where earnings largely depend on tips, this has meant a precipitous drop in income. The economic news was hard to fathom. Back in May, even the *Wall Street Journal* (10 May) was headlining that the slump was the “Worst Since Great Depression” – and that was months before the worst-ever fall in GDP reported at the end of July.

Housing: From Unbearable to Impossible?

Millennials who got stimulus checks have been more likely than Baby Boomers or Gen X to use them to cover housing costs. In New York City, many were left on the hook for sky-high rents, when roommates or subletters who had come to town for work or study now fled the epicenter to quarantine back home. For large numbers of young people, moving to big cities has long been a necessity when it comes to getting any kind of decent job – yet more often than not, rent winds up canceling out potential gains.

Among those remaining, extra strain was added to close living quarters, as quarantine set in; many have been holed up at home nearly 24/7. Moreover, living with roommates or multiple family members can mean a greater risk of being exposed to the virus, especially if any household members are frontline workers.

Now eviction moratoriums are beginning to expire. Vast numbers of people, above all those whom racist oppression and poverty wages make most vulnerable to the depredations of the profit system, face the threat of

³ “Unemployment rates by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity,” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2 July) shows that unemployment rates among black people and Latinos – already higher than among whites – increased disproportionately in all age brackets, including millennials and Gen Z, with the development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴ See “Why the Covid-19 economy is particularly devastating to millennials, in 14 charts,” *Vox*, 5 May.

being thrown out on the street. Even millennials whose economic/family/social circumstances and/or opportunities had given them some sense of security fear that the ground is opening up beneath their feet.

Already before the pandemic hit, the impossible housing situation led to an important fight by University of California Santa Cruz graduate student workers who didn’t even come close to making the \$2,600 it costs on average to rent an apartment in Santa Cruz. Launching a strike last February, their only demand was a cost-of-living-adjustment of \$1,412 a month to keep up with these wildly inflated rents. (See “A Militant Program to Win UC Grad Student Workers Strike,” *internationalist.org*, March 2020.)

Systemic Racial Oppression

In describing the millennial and Gen Z cohorts of the U.S. population, the media often call them “more diverse” than preceding generations in the United States. They often quantify this by referring to the decrease, from one generation to the next, in the percentage of people classified as “white”: 75% of Baby Boomers, 61.5% of Generation X, then about 56% of millennials and 51.5% of Gen Z in 2016 (Brookings Institute, “Diversity defines the millennial generation,” 28 June 2016).

What Marxists call special (or double) oppression is also reflected in the differential ways that the current situation is affecting African American and Latino millennials.⁵ Mass protests against the unending epidemic of racist police terror have highlighted the fact that racial oppression is systemic, and here we see more examples of what that means.

On top of the deeply-rooted, ongoing history and long-term structural effects of racial oppression, both the 2008 and coronavirus crises have produced enormous additional “disadvantages” (as bourgeois economists call it) for black and Latino millennials in terms of jobs, finances, housing, education, etc. A disproportionately large number must also support aging parents. Many now find themselves part of capitalism’s “essential but disposable” workforce, while African American and Latino people are being hit especially hard by the pandemic. Over the past months, higher percentages of black and Latino workers have been laid off or had their hours cut.

For people who “qualify” for unemployment benefits, navigating through the bureaucratic maze of the application process is a nightmare that can seem like a full-time job.

⁵ See, for example, “The American Dream already eluded millennials of color. Then came coronavirus,” *Washington Post*, 28 April.



Ben Frachtenberg / The City

Hundreds of residents of Corona, Queens, line up to receive free food from a church, April 27. More than 200,000 undocumented workers in New York City have lost their jobs or cannot find work in the midst of the pandemic.

What about for workers “without papers”? Many industries and services depend on their labor, and billions in taxes are taken from their pay. Yet among the innumerable basic rights denied them are unemployment benefits (not to mention the weekly additional \$600 or stimulus checks). Together with our comrades of *Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas* (Class Struggle International Workers), we demand an immediate end to this discrimination, and that all workers have equal access to these benefits. The bourgeoisie subjects immigrant workers to ruthless super-exploitation during times of “normal” business and profits – and now holds the threat of starvation over them and their families, together with I.C.E. raids, cages and deportations. *Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!*

Capitalist Irrationality or Socialist Revolution

So today, what was already an uphill climb for millennials and Gen Z now seems like trying to scale an insurmountable summit. Like those interviewed in the mass media’s feature stories, many wonder whether we will ever have a stable job, or any chance at a stable future. As meager incomes often plummeted to zero, in March and April it became a “thing” for tenants to share screenshots on social media of text and email correspondence in which their landlords harassed them about paying rent, scolded them for not having enough savings to cover a months-long shutdown and threatened to evict them the second moratoriums expire.

Meanwhile, hotels and luxury high-rises sit empty. This is the irrationality of capitalist society, in which the necessities of life for millions are held hostage to the private profits of a few. The same workings of this system, that keeps houses and apartments empty if they don’t make money for real-estate barons, meant pouring milk into ditches while children starved in the Great Depression. Why? Because profit wasn’t being made from it. What was perfectly logical from capitalism’s standpoint was totally irrational from that of human needs. The stark counterposition between the two radicalized a generation in the 1930s. Today, when human existence is at stake in so many ways, those horrified by capitalism’s irrationality need to reject the lie that capitalism can be reformed, and join the fight for socialist revolution.

Struggles over racist oppression, evictions, homelessness, unemployment, workers’ health and safety and other burning issues give a glimpse of some of the battles that can break out over the next period. Crucial to these is revolutionary leadership, bringing out the power of the multiracial working

class and oppressed. Housing is one example of why the workers must use that power to free the means of producing the necessities of life – which were created by, and depend on, their labor – from the death grip of capital. To make housing a right for all requires, in the first place, expropriating the parasitic landlords. This certainly won’t happen under capitalism. It is part of the program of socialist revolution and a workers government.

Student debt is another example, and is an issue of enormous concern both to millennials and Gen Z. Wiping out that debt is an important demand, but one that the capitalist system cannot support. Total student debt in the U.S. totals \$1.6 trillion dollars. And while shady loan-shark operations do the foot work of collecting payment from debtors, these collection agencies are of course tied up with the whole system of finance capital. To proposals to write off \$1.6 trillion in student debt, the big banks would point out that the capitalist economy would tank – even if it weren’t undergoing a crisis that by various measures has already surpassed that of the 1930s.

But is that debt sustainable, or to ask the question another way: can we pay it? Obviously not. The only *realistic* approach is based on an understanding that canceling it goes together with breaking the power of capital, expropriating the banks and industry and establishing an economy democratically planned for human needs, not profit. Needless to say, no capitalist government can or will do this. These are tasks of a workers government. What’s totally unrealistic is accepting the limits imposed by capitalism.

In the weeks after Minneapolis cops murdered George Floyd, outrage over racist police brutality and the systemic racism of U.S. society led to the biggest sustained protests in U.S. history.⁶ While Democratic politicians, “non-governmental” organizations (NGOs) and reformist “left” groups have worked overtime pushing illusions that police terror can be reformed away, we have built revolutionary contingents emphasizing the raw truth that racist capitalism cannot be reformed and that only revolution can bring justice. Articles in this issue of *Revolution* approach many aspects of these burning questions.

Millennials and Gen Z are largely critical of capitalism and many express sympathy toward radical ideas, often voicing a favorable view of socialism. “I don’t want the next 20 years to look like the previous 20 years,” a Morehouse College

⁶ See “Millions Take the Streets in Upheaval Against Cop Murder Machine – To Uproot Racist Oppression: Socialist Revolution,” *The Internationalist* No. 60, May-July 2020.



Internationalist contingent at July 7 protest outside New York City housing court in Brooklyn. Instead of pleading with Democratic Party politicians to enact “fair” housing policies, we call for worker/community action to stop evictions and to expropriate the real estate barons through workers revolution.



Graduating college students display their accumulated student debt.

student told BuzzFeed News (20 April). “I don’t believe that just moving 2 feet is enough,” going on to paraphrase Malcolm X: “if there’s a knife in my back and it’s 9 inches deep and you take it out 6 inches, you haven’t done anything to help me, really.” Hailey Modi, a 21-year-old student at UT Austin, is quoted in the same article:

“Our whole lives, these structures have failed us and we are looking for political stances outside the mainstream – because we feel like we don’t have time to solve these issues like income inequality and climate change. Incremental change isn’t going to get us there in time to prevent – this is dramatic, but it feels like a societal collapse.”

This is a big shift from the highly anti-communist consciousness that came out of 1950s McCarthyism and the Cold War. Of course, when it comes to what socialism actually means, U.S. capitalism’s education system teaches people very little except rank *mis*-education. The same goes for the real history of radical and revolutionary movements. Partly as a result of that, it was easier for opportunist illusion-pushers to market claims that “socialism” is Bernie Sanders-style “progressive” Democratic liberalism, harking back to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. Lots of millennials and Gen Zers bought into Sanders’ hype, but after the Bernie-mania bubble burst (twice), it’s started to dawn on some that his so-called political revolution was a political scam. (See article on page 19 of this issue.)

As communists, we “speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be,” and “base [our] program on the logic of the class struggle,” in accordance with the “rules of the Fourth International” that Leon Trotsky – who together with V.I. Lenin led the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution – put forward in the “Transitional Program.”⁷ The truth is that only through socialist revolution can our most basic problems be tackled.

Against the ruthless logic of the profit system, we demand what is needed for the working class, youth and all the oppressed. In the depths of the Great Depression, when “property owners and their lawyers” denounced the demands of the exploited as unrealizable, the Transitional Program stated: “The question is one of life or death.... If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish.” Calling to “open the road to the youth,” it raised the red banner of international socialist revolution.

Today, capitalism’s time has long been up; it is high time for it to perish. Join us in the fight for a socialist future! ■

⁷ “The Transitional Program” is the popular name for *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, the founding program of the Fourth International (FI). The Revolutionary Internationalist Youth is the youth section of the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, which was established in 1998 with the objective of reforging Trotsky’s FI, the world party of socialist revolution.

Bernie Sanders...

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tions of the exploiters and oppressors.

With police killings of black people continuing unabated and American capitalism showing ever more blatantly its inability to meet the population’s basic needs, it is vital that we define our terms and know who our friends and who our enemies are. On top of 150,000+ deaths, many of them preventable, from the coronavirus pandemic, the working class faces large-scale unemployment, impoverishment, cuts to services and an anticipated avalanche of mass evictions. The upsurge of protest after the police murder of George Floyd points to further social struggle ahead. For young people who see the need to fight effectively and avoid the many traps and pitfalls set by those whose business it is to deceive and demobilize us, political clarity is essential.

Part of the struggle for that political clarity has been forthrightly showing the real role of “Democratic socialist” politicians like Bernie Sanders and AOC, and those who have assiduously spread illusions in them. The fight against racist oppression, capitalist exploitation and imperialist war can never be waged within the Democratic Party – and given its central role in U.S. capitalism’s political set-up, that fight is largely a struggle *against* the Democratic Party. To fight for socialism, it is crucial to break once and for all with the Democrats and build a revolutionary workers party to lead the multiracial, multi-ethnic working class to power. ■

Resignation...

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cannot be on the side of Mumia Abu-Jamal and of his jailers.¹

And as we all know, the struggle against racist police repression and mass incarceration is one of the most burning issues of all in this country founded on slavery. This is most definitely the case here in the Twin Cities area. In Minnesota “at least 164 people died” at the hands of the police between 2000 and 2017, as reported by the *Star Tribune* (March 21, 2018). How many cops were even charged in that period? Two. None were convicted. It is not possible to be a Marxist, to actually fight for socialism and world revolution,

¹ [Footnote from original document.] Speaking of Mumia, the former Black Panther and radical black journalist whose case has been a world-wide banner of the struggle against the racist death penalty, mass incarceration and bourgeois frame-up “justice” for more than three decades: a search for his name on the IMT socialistrevolution.org site only gives two results, one from 2000 and the other twelve years ago in 2007.

without burning indignation and revulsion against this and the whole system of racist police repression and racist mass incarceration. That is the opposite of “solidarity” with prison guards, support for cop “unions” and the rest of it. This position also has its roots in the tradition of the Militant Tendency, which called for “democratic control” of the police, a reformist, social-democratic demand raised by the British section of the IMT as well.

I have been asked what I think of the Internationalist Group and its program. What has become more and more clear to me over the past period is that the IG does fight to put the program of revolutionary Marxism into practice in the class struggle. Here are some aspects of this: raising it in the thick of mass protests against police repression; in union organizing drives of immigrant workers; sparking strikes and work stoppages against imperialist war and for the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal; raising the defense of Venezuela and of the deformed workers states of China and North Korea against U.S. imperialism; fighting for the political independence of the working class against all illusions in Sanders and other Democratic (Party) “socialists,” the DSA, etc.; fighting to reforge the Fourth International of Trotsky as world party of the socialist revolution.

In the course of the recent discussions and study, these issues have become increasingly clear – and even glaring – to me. Continuing my commitment to put the Trotskyist program into practice, I intend to deepen my study of the program and practice of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and League for the Fourth International, and encourage others to do as well. I hereby resign from the IMT.

James B.

Minneapolis-St. Paul

29 April 2019

League for the Fourth International

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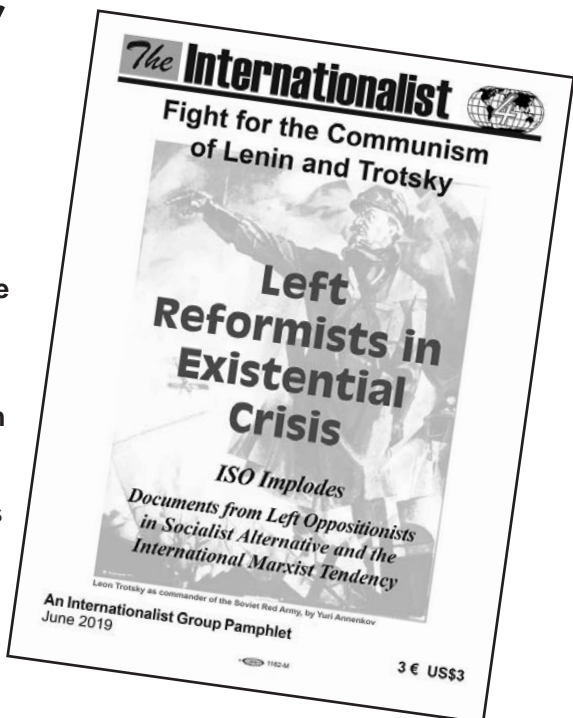
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Socialist Revolution the Only Way Out

Capitalism's Crises Pummel Millennials, Gen Z

By Cora

This is part of a longer upcoming article to be published in the press of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.

The idea that capitalism is crushing generations of young people used to be dismissed by the mainstream media as far-out leftist rhetoric. Yet it's a basic fact of the society we live in – and these days, even pillars of the big-business press run one story after another about some of what this means on the ground. What is to be done about it? On that, of course, they haven't got a clue. But for those of us unwilling to be thrown on the profit system's scrap heap, there is only one real way out: joining the fight for socialism, for international working-class revolution.

Things were grim for millennials and Generation Z before the current crisis.¹ How much worse it's gotten now is hard to comprehend. Millennials were already hit hard by the crash of 2008, plus the crippling amounts of student debt they took on in the hope of securing the kind of stable, well-paying jobs that have become so elusive. And even before the current pandemic/economic meltdown, the oldest of Generation Z was poised to be – or already was – in the position the oldest millennials were in when the bubble burst in 2008: graduating into a barren job market that will set them up for low and stagnant wages, if any.

Now, youth by the millions are thrown into unemployment, which has reached the highest levels since World War II even by official statistics (which systematically un-

¹ The Pew Research Center defines these demographics: "millennials" are people born between 1981 and 1996, while if you were born from 1997 onward, you're part of "Generation Z." Those born from 1965 to 1980 make up "Generation X," while people born from 1946 to 1964 are "Baby Boomers" (pewresearch.org, 28 April).

dercount the jobless by not counting those who have given up looking for work). On July 30, it was reported that the U.S. economy had the biggest quarterly fall ever, with gross domestic product (GDP) plunging by almost a third on an annualized basis from April to June. The following day, we saw the news that the \$600 extra weekly Pandemic Unemployment Compensation had come to an end, with any potential extension remaining a political football between Democrats and Republicans. For those who were able to get it, that money was what made it barely possible to buy groceries and try to keep up with sky-high rents. Huge numbers are asking ourselves: how are we supposed to survive? In the Great Depression of the 1930s, reds posed the stark alternative: "Fight or starve!" In 2020 it sure looks like that's what faces us now.

From the 2008 Meltdown to Today's Triple Pandemic

Back in April, a flurry of "human interest" coverage in the media gave part of the story of what it meant for the lives of millennials and Gen Z to be shaped by one devastating crisis on top of another in the course of a dozen years. A young woman named Gia related how, growing up in Detroit during the financial crisis, "I saw so many people whose only options were to abandon their homes and leave and run – and these were full families who had no safety net, no one to take care of them, nothing to fall back on and their only option left was to abandon their lives ... it just seemed like such an illusion" (Buzzfeed News, 20 April).

The pressure-cooker sense of accumulating hopelessness is palpable in a feature story in the *New York Times* (6 April) on youth trying to cope with the debt burden and economic crisis. Among those the *Times* interviewed is 23-year-old Jayci Cumberledge in Amherst, Ohio. After the restaurant she

worked for closed, she spent the entirety of her \$80 savings on her car payment, borrowed \$200 from a friend to cover rent, and then was able to make some extra money by selling foot pictures (it's a niche market) on the internet. "You compare it to the older generations – they worked up and saved money," she said. The situation she faced even before losing her job in mid-March made her feel "like I'm never going to have a stable job that has benefits and health insurance." Today, millions of millennials and Gen Zers can say the same, or worse.

It's been a long time since the standard expectation of parents in the U.S. was supposed to be that the next generation would live better than them. For millennials and Gen Z now, life and what they expect from it has been shaped in large part by the capitalist economic meltdown of 2007-08 followed now by a new economic crisis – the worst since the Great Depression – that, while already on the horizon before the coronavirus hit, was touched off by it. Together with these afflictions, unending racist police terror makes it a triple pandemic.

In the period after the Wall Street crisis exploded in 2008, as older millennials were entering the workforce, many of their younger counterparts watched their parents and those around them struggle financially. Many working-class families, and middle-class ones too, that had managed to "own" homes often lost them amidst the subprime mortgage crisis.² Winthrop University senior Téa Franco described her family's experience with that financial crisis to BuzzFeed News (20 April):

"They got a bunch of vulnerable people to pay more for houses than they could really

afford, and my parents were some of those vulnerable people.... They had bought a new house and we thought everything was going well and it turned out that it was a house that they couldn't actually afford. So in 2008, we lost our house, too."

The impact of 2008 continued to loom large for millions. In 2016, millennials' median income was 10% lower than it was in 2007, and their median wages in 2017 were 20% lower than those of "Baby Boomers" had been at the same age. (*Vox*, 5 May) They are getting married and having children later, and fewer are buying houses (*Washington Post*, 19 March 2019). While many bourgeois pundits loved to decry these as symptoms of immaturity, unwillingness to settle down and a penchant for avocado toast, pollsters found most millennials valuing stable employment, which was hard to come by and now sounds like pie in the sky. Meanwhile wages stayed stuck (though of course prices didn't, tuition climbed ever upward and rents kept getting even more insane).

According to a 2016 Gallup report ("How Millennials Want to Work and Live"), as of that year millennials had the highest rates of unemployment and underemployment, 7% compared to 5% of Gen X and 4% of Boomers. (Again, the official rates are systematically undercounted – and of course things are drastically worse today.) The same report listed an even greater generational disparity for people employed part-time but who want to be working full-time: 10% of millennials, 6% of Gen X, and 4% of Boomers. While the report did not break figures down by race or ethnicity, the reality of systemic oppression means unemployment rates are persistently higher for African Ameri-

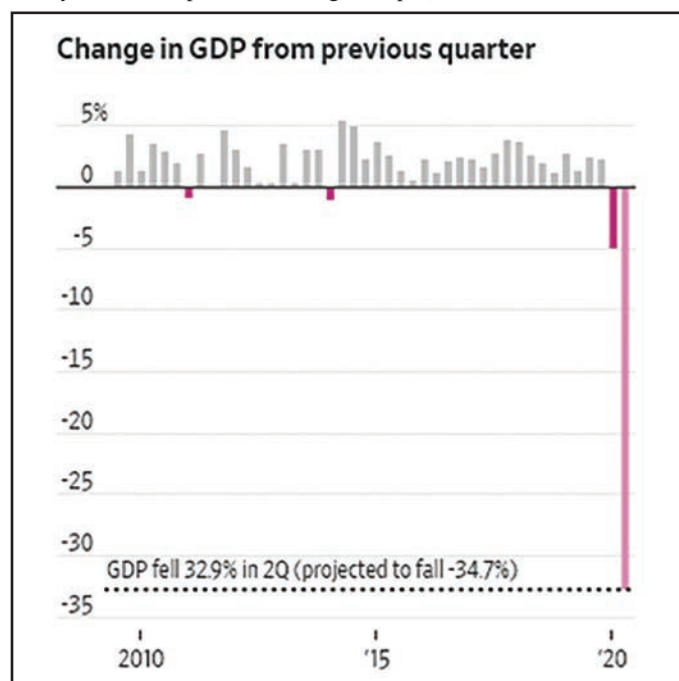
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July 24 protest of unemployed restaurant workers in Dallas, Texas. Demonstrators demanded an extension of the \$600 weekly Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, which was a lifeline for millions of unemployed.

Juan Figueroa / Dallas Morning News

Wall Street Journal



Annualized GDP fell by 32.9% from April to June.

² See "It's Not Just the 'Banksters,' It's the Capitalist System" (review of *The Big Short*), *Revolution* No. 12, March 2016.