

Break with the Democrats – Build a Workers Party!

## Free Abortion on Demand How Revolutionaries Fight for It

By Maeve

The United States Supreme Court – that reactionary institution of unelected, appointed-for-life, black-robed dispensers of capitalist “justice” – overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision on June 24. Shredding the ruling that was the basis for the constitutional right to abortion since 1973, it opened the way for even further onslaughts against basic democratic rights. Due to so-called trigger laws on the books, thirteen states immediately banned abortion in most, if not all, cases. Eight more quickly passed their own prohibitions. Bans in even more states are working their way through the courts. The impact was soon felt: less than a week after the ruling, a 10-year-old rape victim in Ohio was forced to cross state lines to obtain an abortion in Indiana. Then on August 5, Indiana passed a near-total abortion ban.

Back in May, when Justice Samuel Alito’s deranged draft decision was leaked,

it sparked mass protests in cities around the country. After the decision was put into effect, many thousands more came out in protest. The following article is an expanded version of a talk given by comrade

Maeve of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth in late May, at events organized by the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York.

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### Women’s Liberation through Socialist Revolution!



Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and CUNY Internationalist Clubs at July 2 protest to defend abortion clinic in downtown Manhattan from anti-abortion bigots.

On May 2, it was leaked that the Supreme Court intends to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision which established the constitutional basis of the legal right to have an abortion. After years of piecemeal attacks in the form of six-week bans, heartbeat bills and “god squad” thugs threatening and attacking abortion clinics, this decision is a threat to abortion rights everywhere in the United States.

Liberals want to use this to round up votes for the Democrats. But we revolutionary Marxists explain that only by unchaining the power of the workers and oppressed can this onslaught against basic rights be defeated. To bring out that power we have to fight independently from, and against, the capitalist parties and politicians.

For us the fight for the right of pregnant people to get an abortion – for free, unrestricted abortion on demand – is part and parcel of the struggle to achieve real and

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### Selling Imperialist War, from 1898 to ... WWII?

## “You Furnish the Pictures, and I’ll Furnish the War”

If you want to push a war drive abroad, flood the public with war propaganda on the home front. Feature blood-curdling images, sound bites, and plenty of propaganda for good vs. evil, us vs. them. Like they say, “Keep it simple, stupid.” Lay it on as thick as possible. Don’t let up – it’s got to be relentless. No questions asked or allowed. Any doubt about the story? That’s downright unpatriotic – there ought to be a law against it. Maybe there will be soon. And since “our” government is the embodiment of democracy, it must be telling the truth.

So say U.S. imperialism’s media masters of war.

It’s all on daily display right now in these United States. Casting Russia and China as the evil empires to be vanquished, hailing U.S. imperialism’s latest good guys *du jour*, the big business media egg on Washington’s escalating war provocations, from the straits of Taiwan to the Ukraine/Russia front. But the pattern was set long ago.

Way back in 1897, mass-media mogul William Randolph Hearst worked out the

playbook. “You Furnish the Pictures, and I’ll Furnish the War.” This, the history books tell us, is what Hearst cabled to his star illustrator in the lead-up to the Spanish-American War. Shocking and heart-wrenching images were urgently needed, the pioneer of “yellow” (sensationalist) journalism insisted. What for? Why, to sell lots of newspapers from the Hearst media empire, of course. But above all, to *sell the war* – which, soon enough, broke out and made the United States a player in the big league of imperialist powers.

### “Remember the Maine!”

So Hearst, his fellow colonialist Teddy Roosevelt, plus a raft of fellow empire-builders, robber barons, racists and war enthusiasts were more than ready in February 1898, when the U.S. battleship *Maine* blew up in Havana harbor. Long before the bullets were flying and actual bombs started falling, the U.S. public was being relentlessly bombarded with war propaganda. This included plenty of bloodcurdling pictures, including of the *Maine* in flames.

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# Bolshevik Revolution First Legalized Abortion on Demand

By Xiomara

In today's struggles over abortion rights, an important fact is little known: abortion on demand was first legalized in Bolshevik Russia. The connection between women's rights and the struggle for a classless society free of exploitation and oppression was basic to the revolutionary program going back to the founders of the socialist movement.<sup>1</sup> But it was the 1917 October Revolution in Russia that made it possible to start putting that program into effect. It was in this context that free abortion on demand was established in 1920.

The October Revolution was groundbreaking in many ways. One of the most notable was the swiftness with which the new, Soviet government established by the Bolsheviks abolished the old tsarist laws discriminating against women, and enacted measures to help lay the foundation for the full emancipation of women. While such a deep-going transformation does not happen overnight (let alone in an economically backward and war-torn country like Russia in 1917), a workers state with revolutionary leadership could and did accomplish those pioneering measures immediately. Still, as V.I. Lenin, Alexandra Kollontai and other Bolshevik leaders emphasized, the fight for full emancipation went beyond the level of laws and decrees. It meant getting to the material roots of oppression. The Bolsheviks were determined not just to make a start but to advance the struggle systematically, not just within Russia but by fighting to spread the revolution internationally.

When the Soviet government established the right to abortion on demand in 1920, this occurred **53 years** before the United States established the constitutional right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade* (which has now been overturned). And unlike the capitalist USA even when *Roe* was still in effect, what Bolshevik Russia established was free abortion on demand – *free* meaning cost-free as well as by free decision of the woman, at any stage of pregnancy. Furthermore, support for working mothers was introduced. This included 16 weeks of



**"Down with Kitchen Slavery! Forward to a New Life." Soviet poster by artist Grigory Shegal. Background shows factory cafeteria, nursery, workers' club.**

paid maternity leave. These and other measures went far beyond what was available to the women of capitalist countries.

The young Soviet republic becoming the first country in the world to grant women access to a legal and cost-free opportunity to terminate pregnancy was part of efforts to overcome the backward, tsarist past. The old tsarist law code, which included punitive anti-abortion laws, was abolished in October (November by the Western calendar) of 1917. What would come after that was discussed and debated. In 1919, the Commissariat of Justice asked the Commissariat of Health to get input from the medical field regarding formal legalization of abortion.<sup>2</sup> The old laws, of

<sup>2</sup> Susan Gross Solomon, "The Soviet Legalization of Abortion in German Medical Discourse," *Social Studies of Science*, August 1992.

course, had not prevented women from terminating pregnancies, and the dangers of underground abortions and those based on home remedies were often the focus of discussion (sometimes fueling negative attitudes toward abortion per se). As public debate spread, the Commissariat of Health started receiving a flood of letters. One worker from a factory with many women workers wrote to Health commissar Nikolai Semashko in early 1920: "Within the past six months, among 100 to 150 young people under age 25, I have seen 15 to 20 percent of them making abortions without a doctor's help. They simply use household prod-

ucts: They drink bleach and other poisonous mixtures."<sup>3</sup>

The revolutionary government's health officials considered it crucial that the procedure be carried out legally by doctors in hospitals – and obviously many women wanted better and safer alternatives to old and unsafe practices. A significant number of women, both rural and urban, also were aware that there were various forms of contraception, and eager for more information. On 18 November 1920, the Health and Justice commissariats issued the edict that not only formally legalized abortion but stipulated that it would be performed for free, by doctors, in hospitals.

Many assumed it would be mainly young, single and unemployed women who would mainly use this service. However, those doing so came from almost all demographics, though most were urban residents. This was partly due to more modern attitudes being more widespread in the cities, and partly because health services were still less available in the countryside. And most of those getting abortion turned out to be women who already had children, who were often using abortion to limit family size. Contraceptive devices – which were rudimentary, and often outright illegal, in the wealthy capitalist countries – were legal but scarce in revolutionary Russia, where the still-low level of industrial development had been sharply exacerbated by World War One, then the Russian Civil War and intervention by imperialist powers, including the U.S., trying to wipe out the Revolution. (They were defeated by the workers and peasants Red Army, built by Leon Trotsky.)

## Before the Revolution

What was life like for the women of Russia prior to 1917? Bleak, to say the least; in fact it was horrendously oppressive. Even women in society's small upper crust could not take a job or hold a passport without their husband's permission. For the majority of Russia's women, conditions were not so different from medieval times. Women in the countryside were often sold to whichever potential husband was the highest bidder. The father would then give the new husband a whip to symbolize his authority over his wife. Men were able to beat their wives openly and without consequence.

Treated as property, essentially not considered human, women of the lower classes had their lives ruined in countless ways. Things only became more difficult when childbearing was involved. Multiple pregnancies, miscarriages and high infant mortality rates were devastating and kept huge numbers of women confined to the home. The cause of not only freeing women from tsarist Russia's barbaric conditions but winning their full legal, political and social equality was passionately embraced by generations of young Russian women and men radicals and rebels. Many became part of the revolutionary Marxist movement, including Kollontai, Nadezhda Krupskaya, Larissa Reissner and others who are among figures of the past whose ideas and actions help inspire our struggles today.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1917 marked a turning point in Russian and world history. Industrial centers had grown rapidly as the tsarist regime built up its war industries in particular, and significant numbers of young women were among those drawn into the urban working class. Russia's participation in the horrific bloodshed of the imperialist First World War led to a massive upheaval in February (March by the Western calendar) of 1917. The tsar was overthrown in the "February Revolution" – which was sparked by International Women's Day, which in 1917 involved a massive strike and demonstrations of 150,000 people. Women workers started the Russian Revolution.<sup>5</sup>

But the Provisional Government arising from the February Revolution was a bourgeois government: a coalition between opportunist "socialist" parties and capitalist politicians. None of the basic problems were resolved at all: not the question of the imperialist war, the peasants' poverty and subjugation to landlords, the exploitation of the workers, and the danger of counterrevolution led by rightist military officers. While women were granted the right to vote, this only scratched the surface of their oppression and certainly did not equate to liberation.

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<sup>4</sup> See, among other great resources, *Bolsheviks and the Liberation of Women* (Internationalist pamphlet, 2005), and our special issue on "Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution," *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See "International Women's Day Sparked the 1917 Russian Revolution," in *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Wendy Z Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution* (1993).

**Visit the League for the Fourth International/  
Internationalist Group on the Internet**

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## Revolution

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# Democrats, Republicans – Enemies of Women’s Liberation

## NYC and L.A. Campus Speak-Outs in Defense of Abortion Rights



Left: Speak-out for abortion rights called by CUNY Internationalists outside Hunter College on May 9. Right: May 12 speak-out called by the Internationalist Club at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

The following report was first published in the *Revolutionaries in the Class Struggle* blog ([igclassstruggle.blogspot.com](http://igclassstruggle.blogspot.com)) on May 9, after the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was leaked; subsequently, on June 24, the decision was formally issued.

Following the May 2 leak of a Supreme Court draft ruling which would gut the right to abortion in the U.S., massive protests broke out across the country. Internationalist activists initiated speak-out protests outside the City University of New York (CUNY) Hunter College campus and at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) in defense of this basic democratic right, raising the call for “Free Abortion on Demand!” Nationally, the Democratic Party has long used the threatened overturn of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision establishing a constitutional right to abortion to get out the vote against the Republicans. But for many young women in particular, this is not about bourgeois pressure politics as usual – it is a shocking assault on their most basic rights, which they urgently want to defend.

In New York on May 9, over 150 Hunter College students, faculty and staff, joined by labor and immigrant-rights activists, participated. Many were moved to speak, with young women in particular expressing their fear and frustration with the prospect of losing the right to make choices about their medical care. Speakers also included the vice president of the CUNY faculty/staff union (Professional Staff Congress), the current and former chairs of the PSC’s Hunter chapter, and representatives of the Laundry Workers Center and of Student Workers of Columbia, which won its ten-week strike last December.

Young people in the U.S. have until now had the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, although doing so often involved overcoming many obstacles. The right to choose whether or not to have a child was taken as a given. They now face the stark reality of what outlawing abortion may mean for them personally, and *will*

mean for large numbers of women. In 19 states, according to Planned Parenthood, the likely Supreme Court move will lead to the right to abortion being eliminated, and in ten other states access to abortion will become severely restricted.

One of the Internationalist activists who helped build the protest said:

“Defending the right to abortion is a very important issue to large numbers of students throughout CUNY, including at Hunter College. We and our parents and siblings work in jobs called essential but get treated as expendable. Now they want to make it even harder, in fact they’re trying to make it virtually impossible for large numbers of women in this country to get an abortion. The working class needs to use its power against this. “We need to fight for the full and unrestricted right to abortion. We emphasize the call for free abortion on demand. We know the Supreme Court is a reactionary institution going back to slavery days. We haven’t forgotten what we’ve learned about the Dred Scott decision. And today we know the whole deck is stacked against us in terms of the political and social system. Republicans openly denounce abortion rights – but we know that the Democrats are ‘faux friends’ of women’s rights. They seek women’s votes but Biden backed the Hyde Amendment for decades and Democrats have long let abortion rights bills die in Congress. We have to rely on our own power, the power of the workers and the oppressed that keeps everything going.... Workers and students could actually shut this city down – and we need to use working-class power more than ever now, independently of all the powers that be, which is why we say the fight for women’s liberation can only win as a revolutionary struggle against the whole capitalist system.”

At the Hunter speak-out, protesters expressed a range of perspectives and spoke about many aspects of the anti-abortion offensive. Women professors shared moving recollections of their personal experiences from the days when abortion was outlawed.

A PSC member spoke of her experience obtaining an illegal abortion at the age of 16. She spoke about needing to borrow money and pay “whatever the cost” in cash and traveling hundreds of miles. “It meant walking up the back stairs of a doctor’s office to see a doctor who was going to perform an abortion without any anesthesia, who gave me something in my mouth to hold my teeth together so I wouldn’t cry.” This professor also spoke of her difficulties trying to receive post-abortion healthcare, and being denied it because she had had an abortion. This and other experiences related by faculty and staff in attendance powerfully exemplified some of the horrifying realities of what the gutting of abortion rights may mean for young people.

Members of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and other student participants emphasized the connection between defense of abortion rights and the struggles of all the oppressed. They connected the struggle to the fight to unionize Amazon and to a current campaign by Guatemalan immigrant construction workers in Brooklyn in defense of their rights on the job, initiated by the Laundry Workers Center. Speakers emphasized the *racist* nature of the attacks on abortion rights, noting the forced sterilizations of black, Puerto Rican and indigenous women, and called out the vile hypocrisy of the evangelical bigots of the “pro-life” movement.

In an anti-democratic move flying in the face of the decades-long tradition of “speak-outs” outside Hunter College, the Hunter Internationalist Club was threatened with suspension for having supposedly initiated the event without administration “permission.” This did not put a damper on the militancy of the CUNY Internationalists, who redoubled their efforts, linking abortion rights to the fight for women’s liberation through socialist revolution. Strikingly, most in the crowd responded positively to explanations of how the Democrats use the issue of abortion rights to round up votes, despite having ditched, evaded or helped bury it outright in practice.

### Los Angeles

On May 12, over 100 people attended a speak-out in defense of abortion rights hosted by the Internationalist Club at UCLA. While across the country and in Los Angeles there were campus protests held in conjunction with the May 14 nationwide pro-Democratic Party women’s marches, the Internationalist speak-out took a clear stand against illusions in the Democrats as “friends of women” and stressed the urgent need for revolutionary class struggle to fight for the liberation of women and all the oppressed.

An Internationalist Club speaker introduced this perspective saying, “We are here to defend abortion rights. We call for free abortion on demand. We say that the question of whether a woman continues a pregnancy is nobody’s business but hers!” The speaker went on: “The attacks on reproductive rights are not coming only from the Republicans, but the Democrats are aiding and abetting this assault.... While the Democrats have control of the White House and Congress, they could simply legislate abortion rights, but they don’t. That’s why we say that the Democrats are false friends of women.” They added: “Under capitalism any gains that are won can be reversed. And we see that happening now.”

A student spoke powerfully about how the Internationalist Club aims to mobilize the power of the working class in the fight for free and safe abortion on demand and connected this to the struggle in defense of transgender rights. Passionately denouncing the new law in Alabama criminalizing gender-affirming care for trans youth (enacted together with other measures promoting bigotry, such as an anti-trans “bathroom” law and one targeting classroom “instruction or discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity”), the speaker emphasized that the attack on abortion is an attack on working-class women and the whole working class, while “the wives, girlfriends and mistresses of politicians, CEOs, billionaires and millionaires will always get their abortions.” Arising from the depths of

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# Free Abortion...

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full emancipation of women and all the oppressed. What is required for this urgent, deep-going task is nothing less than socialist revolution, establishing the material basis for liberation.

Let's start out by discussing Justice Samuel Alito's draft decision. It has some really bizarre stuff in it. It claims an "unbroken" American "tradition" of criminal punishment for abortion, which is not only terrifying but also a myth. Alito goes on to compare overturning the basic democratic right to abortion to the effective overturning in 1954 of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (1896), which upheld racial segregation. He tries to make the case that *Roe v. Wade* was like *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which enshrined Jim Crow. All this is really grotesque. And in reality, racism ignited and fuels the anti-abortion crusade.<sup>1</sup>

Without protections afforded by *Roe v. Wade* in place, abortion rights will be eliminated or severely restricted in over half the states in the U.S., according to Planned Parenthood's predictions.<sup>2</sup> This means that for large numbers of people in big swathes of the country it would become nearly impossible to get an abortion. Some maps have been put out showing that women in Louisiana, for example, would have to travel up to 500 miles to get this procedure, which is part of basic medical care. Many of those laws will disproportionately impact poor people who may not have the money, access to childcare or time off work making it possible to travel, or the money to pay up-front for a simple medical procedure that can cost almost a thousand dollars. In this and other ways, the anti-abortion onslaught very notably targets African American and Latina women.

In several states, it will be possible for zealots and anti-woman bigots to charge those getting abortions with one or more of the following: fetal assault, chemical endangerment of a fetus, manslaughter, second-degree murder, feticide, child abuse, reckless injury to a child, concealing a birth, concealing a death, neglect of a minor, reckless homicide, attempted procurement of a miscarriage... In September 2021, the Texas legislature passed SB8, also known as the Texas Heartbeat Bill. With this law in place, those who help someone get an abortion can be sued for up to \$10,000 by any bounty hunter looking for big bucks or "god squad" glory. In this truly draconian move, women and other people who can give birth will be subject to the perils of back-alley abortions and forced birth.

The illegalization of abortion will result in some of the most grotesque sorts of physical and emotional trauma, from self-inflicted coat hanger abortions to women being forced to give birth to children that are the result of rape. Because of the life-or-death urgency of this issue, many thousands of people have come out to protests to defend abortion rights.

On May 9 outside Hunter College here in New York, and on May 12 at the University of California at Los Angeles, activists from the Internationalist Clubs organized important abortion rights speak-outs. (See article on page 3.) A good number of students, faculty and staff came out, sharing

their outrage and, in many cases, speaking courageously about some of their own personal experiences around this issue. These events were really different from the "women's marches" built by pro-Democratic Party organizations (and tailed by opportunist left groups). What we put forward in speeches and signs, together with our Marxist literature, was the need for revolutionary class struggle for the liberation of women and all the oppressed.

## The Racist, Bloody History Behind Abortion Bans

If we look at the history of attitudes and laws about abortion, we find that it has not always been painted as some kind of horrendous sin or morally repugnant act. Before European colonial societies existed in North America, native peoples across the continent were performing abortions for myriad socially accepted reasons, using naturally occurring abortifacients such as black root and red cedar. Meanwhile in England, as far back as the Anglo-Saxon period, "common law" was far from considering abortion per se to be murder or "fetal assault" as some right-wingers (including Justice Alito) claim today.<sup>3</sup>

Laws that some states were already passing a decade ago were making it more difficult to get an abortion than it was in colonial New England in the year 1650. And in terms of attitudes about the issue, in the Thirteen Colonies and the early United States uncontroversial references to abortion appeared in the medical literature and in writings by such prominent figures as Benjamin Franklin.<sup>4</sup> Early laws on abortion in the U.S., from the first decades of the 19th century, were concerned with protecting women from dangerous substances in use at the time. Nevertheless, abortifacients were advertised in the popular press and abortion clinics operated openly in the mid-19th century.

The history of abortion bans in the United States is deeply racist. Enslaved black women were prohibited from having abortions; some nevertheless put together abortion-inducing concoctions in secret. Blanket bans on abortion can be traced to the mid-19th century. In 1857, the newly formed American Medical Association began a crusade aimed at the illegalization of abortion at every stage of pregnancy. While the AMA was eager to take control from midwives, a major part of its motivation was anti-black and anti-immigrant prejudice and the fear that "Anglo-Saxon" women were not having enough babies. The most prominent crusader against abortion during this period, physician Horatio Storer, asked if the new western territories of the U.S. would "be filled by our own children or those of aliens." This, he stated, "is a question that our own women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation."<sup>5</sup> When Storer first suggested that all abortions be banned and pregnant woman be held criminally liable, his peers in the medical community thought the idea far-fetched. However, the crusade succeeded; by 1900 abortion was illegal in every state.

In terms of the Catholic Church, those

<sup>3</sup> "Common law" refers to law derived from precedents set by a series of judicial decisions. England's "Anglo-Saxon period" ended in 1066 with the Norman Conquest.

<sup>4</sup> "Scarlet Letters: Getting the History of Abortion and Contraception Right," *Center for American Progress*, 8 August 2013; "Ben Franklin Put an Abortion Recipe in His Math Textbook," *Slate*, 5 May.

<sup>5</sup> "The Fight Over Abortion History," *New York Times*, 4 May.



Chris Sheridan

**Anti-abortion "Pro Bikers for Life" group outside Planned Parenthood clinic in downtown Manhattan. RIY and CUNY Internationalists have frequently brought students and workers out to defense actions to counter the "god squad" reactionaries targeting women seeking abortions.**

who claim its doctrine on abortion goes back 2,000 years are off by more than 1,857 years. Its current stance is about 153 years old, having been proclaimed for political reasons by Pope Pius IX in 1869. It has long been maintained that this was the result of a deal between the pope, who sought support for the doctrine of papal infallibility, and the emperor of France, Napoleon III, who was concerned about a declining birth rate in France and a potential lack of soldiers to serve as cannon fodder for his wars and colonial conquests. The pope's 1869 document removed the prior distinction between an "animated" and an "unanimated" fetus from Church doctrine, declaring instead that life begins at conception. Abortions at any stage of gestation became punishable by excommunication. And papal infallibility was approved by the First Vatican Council, held in 1869-70.

Modern-day attacks on abortion rights follow a similar logic, that making babies is women's duty to the bourgeois fatherland. The right to abortion is seen as threatening to undermine the family unit, and the family is the basic institution through which the labor force is born and reared. The woman in the family plays a vital role for capitalist society in bearing and rearing children, cooking, cleaning and on and on. This household drudgery and servitude are a prison for women. But as capitalism decays, attempts to shore up the family have become increasingly frenzied and fanatical. This is often spearheaded in the U.S. by the religious right (largely though not exclusively based in some evangelical denominations), which increasingly weaponizes doctrines about sin, the duty to give birth no matter what, and "protection" of the unborn. In line with this, over time they have sought to legally set "when life begins" ever earlier and to ramp up the zealotry of attacks on abortion.

Violent attacks by anti-abortion fanatics were already growing alarmingly decades ago. A 1990 article from *Women and Revolution* noted that between 1977 and 1987 anti-abortion terror groups carried out "70 bombings and acts of arson, 213 bomb threats, 216 clinic invasions, 41 acts of assault and battery, 2 kidnappings, 191 instances of vandalism, 61 death threats and 624 pickets and blockades against clinics or facilities."<sup>6</sup> But since then the figures grew even more dramatically:

<sup>6</sup> "USA: The Struggle for Abortion Rights," *Women and Revolution*, Spring 1990. *W&R* was published by the Women's Commission of the then-revolutionary Spartacist League starting in 1971; it ceased publication in 1996.

between 1989 and 2015, the National Abortion Federation received nearly 6,500 reports of anti-abortion violence, including 11 murders and 26 attempted murders.<sup>7</sup>

Some of you here today have participated with us in helping defend clinics. At one of them, on New York's Lower East Side, anti-abortion bikers assemble together with others to menace women who want to get abortions. Once a month the anti-woman religious fanatics form a procession to terrorize women outside the clinic, and are protected by a line of cops. This is one of the things we face in NYC, despite the city being seen as a haven for abortion. The situation is already much worse in many other places – and over the next period that is going to increase sharply. Bringing out the power of the workers and oppressed in this struggle is more urgent than ever, and in many cases is likely to become a matter of life and death for people seeking abortion, and those that defend this basic right.

## The Democrats Won't Protect Abortion Rights

In U.S. politics today, abortion is largely presented as a partisan issue – and the price of admission as a Republican politician is that you proclaim fervent opposition to abortion. It wasn't always that way, and Donald Trump is an example of that fact. He was not always anti-abortion but adopted that position to pursue his ambitions as a Republican Party candidate.

The shift to making an anti-abortion stance that kind of requirement can be traced back to Richard Nixon's 1972 campaign to be reelected as president, when he sought to use the issue to win over anti-abortion Catholics and other socially conservative voters. Republican strategists moved to employ this strategy with other candidates. This overlapped with the rise of the evangelical wing of the anti-abortion movement. A wave of Republican politicians who might have otherwise held relatively liberal stances on abortion started to crusade on this issue. A key example is Ronald Reagan. As governor of California, he signed into law a loosening of restrictions on abortion – but then he went on as president to carry out a full-on assault on abortion. This was pitched as part of promoting "traditional family values" – one of reactionaries' favorite terms, centered on "defending" women's oppression, together with anti-gay bigot-

<sup>7</sup> "2015 Violence and Disruption Statistics," National Abortion Federation, April 2016.





**Jimmy Carter with then-Senator Joseph Biden in 1978. Both were instrumental in pushing the racist Hyde Amendment that barred federal funding for abortions, essentially banning poor African American, Latina and working-class women on Medicare from getting abortions.**

ry, the promotion of censorship, and other “culture war” themes.

However, this was not just a Republican strategy. It was part of a bipartisan effort to cash in on politicized promotion of religion, and on hysteria about “defense of the family” in the wake of the 1960s. Enforcing “women’s place in the home” was explicitly promoted as part of anti-communism during the 1950s Cold War period.<sup>8</sup> After the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, in the ’70s, family-values themes linked to explicitly bringing religion into politics were revved up as part of the push to reassert U.S. power and authority against the Soviet bloc and revolutionary upheavals in the “Third World.”

A key figure in this was Jimmy Carter, who liberals now want to paint as a sweet old philanthropist building houses for the poor. In 1976, the Georgia Democrat Carter ran for president. Up to that point the norm was not to talk about your personal religious views when running for president – but Carter talked about it all the time and ran as a born-again Christian. He also declared that he would defend the “ethnic purity” of neighborhoods and the economic “homogeneity” of affluent suburbs. After he won the election, “Jimmy Carter’s presidency proved crucial to the recrudescence of American military power after Vietnam.”<sup>9</sup> This went hand in hand with him hyping the supposed role of U.S. imperialism as a force for “human rights,” as he revved up his anti-Soviet drive that helped pave the way for his successor in the White House, Ronald Reagan.

What about abortion? Passed in 1976 not long before Carter became president, the notorious Hyde Amendment had his backing, and as a candidate he proclaimed his belief that abortions are “wrong.” The Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of federal funds to pay for abortion, meaning, for example, that people on Medicaid were out of luck if they couldn’t pay out of pocket. As president, Carter signed into law funding bills that included the Hyde Amendment, which has continued in force ever since. This is just one of the ways that anti-abortion legislation is locked, loaded and aimed at poor people.

<sup>8</sup> An important book on this is Elaine May’s *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988).

<sup>9</sup> “Carter Defends All-White Areas,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1976; Jeremy Kuzmarov, “The Improbable Militarist: Jimmy Carter, the Revolution in Military Affairs and Limits of the American Two-Party System,” *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, 2018.

And it’s racist. A quarter of African American women and 17% of Latina women are on Medicaid, so the Hyde Amendment means having to pay hundreds of dollars for this simple medical procedure. Carter was far from the only Democrat who supported the Hyde Amendment. It has been included in every budget passed by every administration since it was first introduced to undermine *Roe v. Wade*. That includes Joe Biden’s administration as late as last year when he quietly claimed he would get rid of it and then backpedaled after a bit of conservative pressure. It is very likely that this will happen again with next year’s budget.<sup>10</sup>

I mention this for two basic reasons. First, it highlights yet again that the Democratic politicians are “faux friends” of women. These bourgeois politicians are our class enemies. And they change their tune on abortion rights when it suits them. The second is that the attacks on abortion, and attempts to curtail women’s basic rights, in pursuit of “defending” the family as capitalism rots, have become more intense and more concerted, on a broader societal scale. As time goes on liberals became increasingly conservative about their language as well, starting out saying they defended abortion but then shifting to saying they were for the right to an abortion and then that they are for “choice,” which is what we hear most often now from mainstream liberals.

Connected to the role of the Carter presidency was the rise of politicized evangelicalism as a force opposing abortion rights. Today, as anyone who follows U.S. politics is aware, politically mobilized evangelical churches, aligned with right-wing Republicans, are a bulwark of the movement to totally eradicate abortion rights. Mike Pence, the spooky religious zealot from Indiana, helped deliver their votes in 2016 to Trump (who didn’t even know how to hold a bible right side up).

But until the mid-1970s, opposition to abortion was considered a “Catholic issue” by most American Protestants. As late as 1971, the Southern Baptist Convention resolved in favor of expanding legal access to abortion. In the immediate aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*, evangelical stances on abortion were far from unanimous. The Christian right coming together in a so-called “pro-life,” anti-abortion movement involved a concerted political effort by Republican strategists such as Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie. As we have emphasized, this drive built on racism, and specifically the outrage

<sup>10</sup> See “Race, Class and the Right to Abortion,” *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022.

of Southern “segregation academies” (the evangelical Bob Jones University in South Carolina is one example) facing the threat of losing tax breaks.

The formation of an actual anti-abortion movement with institutional evangelical support didn’t happen until about six years after *Roe v. Wade*, and had much “more to do with politics than with embryos.” The “anti-abortion crusade was more palatable than the religious right’s real motive: protecting segregated schools.”<sup>11</sup> The racist maneuvers of cynical operatives like Weyrich in the late ’70s laid the basis for the further growth of religious-right coalitions and organizations like Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority in the ’80s. This ultra-reactionary group went all out in linking anti-abortion hysteria with rabid homophobia and anti-communism. Like Focus on the Family, Concerned Women in America and others, Falwell’s outfit highlighted “defense” of women’s traditional “place” as wife and mother in the home as part of its anti-abortion pitch.

The connection to racism is also highlighted by the trajectory of Phyllis Schlafly. A key figure in campaigns against the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), Schlafly ranted that the “ERA means abortion funding, means homosexual privileges” (*sic*) and “whatever else.” Having spent the 1950s agitating against communism, she joined the ultra-right John Birch Society; the atomic bomb “was a marvelous gift given to our country by a wise God,” she wrote. In 1960, at the Republican Party convention, Schlafly helped lead opposition to a plank against racial discrimination and segregation being included in the party platform. In her 1967 book *Safe Not Sorry*, she raved that “race riots” were “organized by outside agitators ... various civil rights and New Left groups saturated with communists.”

This longtime professional racist and anti-communist became a living link to the anti-abortion movement that coalesced in the late ’70s and the ’80s. Though she died several years ago, Schlafly’s Eagle Forum organization continues today, pledged to “protect the institution of marriage” and traditional parental roles; “honor the full-time homemaker”; oppose the ERA, publicly funded daycare and pre-K, same-sex marriage and “illegal aliens” – and to crusade against abortion. Among its core goals: ensuring that the United States will continue to uphold “respect for the nuclear family ... and private enterprise.”

### The Meaning of Free Abortion on Demand

In preparation for this discussion [the CUNY Internationalist events where this talk was originally given], one of the things we read is an article titled “Free Healthcare for All, Free Abortion on Demand.” It came out fifty years ago in what was a unique publication, published when the Spartacist League was still a revolutionary organization: *Women and Revolution* (May 1972). The article makes the point that tailoring demands and strategies to an alliance with bourgeois forces [see article on page 7] necessarily means selling out the needs of women of the working class in general – and particularly those of African American, Latina and other triply-oppressed working women. Supposed leftists who sought to ally with sectors of

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (2019); Randall Balmer, “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” *Politico*, 27 May 2014.

the bourgeoisie divorced themselves from a class-struggle program. After all, such a program would alienate their hoped-for liberal capitalist “sisters” in the movement.

The 1972 article laid out a series of basic demands. Though they would certainly put off the Democrats that reformist groups were trying to court, they were (and are) crucial in the fight against women being relegated to the status of baby factories. These demands included free full-time, quality childcare centers; equal pay for equal work, no job discrimination based on race or sex; end discrimination against gays and lesbians – no laws against any form of sexual activity between consenting individuals; jobs for all, a shorter workweek with no loss in pay (“30 hours work for 40 hours pay”); and workers strikes against the U.S. war on Vietnam. Emphasizing that the workers and oppressed should have “no confidence in bourgeois politicians, male or female,” the article called to break with the capitalist parties and build “a political party of the working class.” This, the historic Marxist journal stated in ’72, is central to the fight for “women’s liberation through socialist revolution.”

Today, the points outlined in that short article remain highly relevant. During the lifetime of everybody at this event today, the U.S. has been at war in one country after another. The struggle for the defeat of U.S. imperialist war remains a burning issue. And now, the U.S./NATO war drive against Russia and China has provoked the reactionary nationalist war on the “eastern front.”<sup>12</sup> U.S. imperialism is yet again confronting us with the literal threat of nuclear annihilation in a Third World War; it did it under JFK, under Nixon and Reagan, and today it’s doing it under Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi (backed by Bernie Sanders plus AOC and the “Squad”) et al. (See article on page 19.)

The demand for free 24-hour childcare, highlighted in that 1972 program, certainly remains key as well. The connection of abortion rights with fighting against discrimination towards gay, lesbian and trans people is underscored by rightists’ push to leverage overturning *Roe* into reversing court decisions on same-sex marriage and escalating anti-trans bigotry. The fact is that dangers are going to be escalating. Fascist and other racist, misogynist and homophobic groups will be further emboldened to launch attacks and provocations. In the face of such threats, mass action by workers and the oppressed will be essential. In all of these struggles, defending our rights is a question of *power*. The fight for workers political independence is a crucial and basic principle for unchaining the power of the working class and bringing it to bear against the powerful enemies that confront us.

Sometimes we are asked what “free abortion on demand” actually means. The “free” part is simple: completely cost-free. Access to abortion is refracted through the prism of class and race in this deeply unequal and racist country. Women of the bourgeoisie have always had access to abortion and always will, even after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*. In our Marxist study group recently, one of our comrades related how even before abortion was legalized, Saudi princesses were among the women who would come to New York to

<sup>12</sup> See “Behind the War: U.S./NATO War Drive Against Russia, China,” *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022.



# U.S. Capitalism and Its Supreme Court

As part of her talk on abortion rights, comrade Maeve discussed some aspects of the history of the courts, racism and women's oppression in the U.S.

Part of the “civic religion” in the United States – the patriotic mythology taught and ritualized as part of bourgeois ideology – is the idea that the legal structure, court decisions, etc., result from some evolutionary process of legal thinking itself, abstracted from what's going on in society. And, of course – despite all the ways that the Constitution was flagrantly shaped by slavery<sup>1</sup> – generations of kids have been taught that it is virtually a holy document. Liberals and reformists see politics in very large part as focusing on efforts to persuade, enlighten, beg and pressure the bourgeois courts, viewing them as embodiments of “justice.”

Marxists understand, on the contrary, that the courts are part of the capitalist state, which – as Lenin details in one of his most essential works, *The State and Revolution* (1917) – is a machine for enforcing the exploitation of the working class. And as capitalism's history, structure and functioning in the U.S. intertwined it with racial oppression, the capitalist injustice machine is and always has been profoundly racist.

In reality, legal decisions, most definitely including those of the Supreme Court, reflect what is happening in society at the time. Up until the Civil War, the Southern slave owners basically controlled the Supreme Court. In the notorious 1857 Dred Scott decision, the court ruled that African Americans, whether free or enslaved, were not and could never be citizens of the United States. It justified this in part by stating that at the time the Constitution was written, it had already been established,

<sup>1</sup> “Slavery and the Constitution: Origins of U.S. Capitalist ‘Democracy,’” *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020.



**“Pillars of Justice”:** 1935 cartoon by leftist artist Jacob Burck reflected outrage against frame-up “justice,” including execution of immigrant anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 and racist drive launched in 1931 to “legally lynch” the Scottsboro black youths on fabricated charges of raping two white women.

“for more than a century,” that black people “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit” (*sic*).

The *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, which Alito brought up in his opinion overruling *Roe*, is another clear example. The Civil War's promise of black freedom had been betrayed by the Northern bourgeoisie, which in the late 1870s “sacrificed Reconstruction on the altar of profit and ‘national reconciliation,’” to quote *The Internationalist*.<sup>2</sup> Partly

<sup>2</sup> “The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal,” *The Internationalist* No. 34, March-April 2013.

to ward off the spectre of poor farmers' interracial organizing in parts of the South, Jim Crow segregation was being consolidated in the 1890s. This, not some doctrinal revelation, was the context for the Supreme Court deciding to enshrine racist segregation – separate but supposedly equal (which everyone knew was a lie) – as constitutionally just fine according to the law of the land.

It took almost six decades for that to be in effect overturned by the court in *Brown v. Board of Education*. So did that happen because in 1954 a light bulb suddenly lit up over their heads? No, formal Jim Crow (which was being undermined by urbanization and industrialization in

the South) had become a real liability for the U.S. ruling class in its Cold War drive against Soviet influence in newly independent countries of Africa, Asia, etc. And now? As reported earlier this year, “Nearly 70 years after Brown decision, New York schools still separate and unequal” (*Times Union* [Albany], 20 February) – in fact this is the state with the highest degree of school segregation in the whole country.

Legal decisions reflect society's material reality, the conditions and the social interests in play. So why did the Supreme Court rule in 1973 that women had a constitutional right to abortion? Reformist leftists tell a story according to which a “mass women's movement” just kept keeping on until it won abortion rights, similar to how, according to them, the Vietnam War was “ended” by the “antiwar movement.” In reality it was the heroic Viet Cong (National Liberation Front) that defeated U.S. imperialism. In the context of that looming defeat, the U.S. ruling class was facing major upheavals: rebellions against racist cop terror, strikes, GI revolts inside the imperialist military, together with mass protests. With society in turmoil, the bourgeoisie made a concession on abortion rights. And, as Marxists have always emphasized, like all concessions or reforms so long as the ruling class remains in power, it could be taken away.

We are seeing that now. Our strategy is based on class struggle, on the revolutionary program. But for liberals and reformists, the 1973 concession by the top court informed their whole approach of reliance on the capitalist courts and above all the Democrats to save the day. This has always been a dead-end strategy, and I think it's pretty clear that this is the case today. ■

get the procedure. That wasn't an option for the majority of people seeking abortion then, and it isn't now.

The second part of the slogan is “on demand.” This is sometimes used in conjunction with “no questions asked.” We don't give a damn what anyone but the pregnant person has to say about it – not parents, husbands, boyfriends, bosses, pastors, priests or politicians. **On demand, unrestricted, no questions asked!** That's what we mean when we say “Free abortion on demand.”

The next part is free quality healthcare for all. This is definitely connected – and despite all the nonsense that anti-abortion reactionaries attach to it, abortion is, and long has been, a simple and safe medical procedure. We are for socialized, free, high-quality medical care for everyone. When faced with major social struggles, the bourgeoisie has sometimes offered crumbs regarding health care, but the only way that high-quality medical care for all, including free abortion on demand, is actually going to be won once and for all in this profit-based society will be *against* the U.S. ruling class. That means a socialist revolution which establishes a workers government to build a society based on human needs, not profit.

Over a hundred years ago, the Russian Revolution pointed the way for this. In 1920, the young Soviet workers state, led by the Bolshevik Party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, established that abortion would be offered free and on demand. (See article on page 2.) They also began to build things like free laundries, childcare centers and dining centers to start doing away with women's domestic servitude. The first workers state's isolation and poverty had effects that were multiplied by the devastation caused by the military intervention of 14 capitalist countries. The U.S. under Woodrow Wilson, Britain, France, Japan, etc. – these countries intervened to back the overthrown capitalists and landlords in the civil war they unleashed against the victorious revolution. All this led to the degeneration of the Soviet workers state with the rise of a conservative nationalist bureaucracy headed by Joseph Stalin, and eventually to capitalist counterrevolution in the early 1990s. But the example and internationalist program of the Bolshevik Revolution remain essential to genuine revolutionary politics today.

Women's oppression is bound up with the whole history of class society, whose oppressive structures increasingly put the very existence of humanity in danger. The

emancipation of women requires getting to the roots of that oppression, uprooting it, and providing the material basis to replace the oppressive bourgeois family with voluntary social institutions that are free in all senses of the word. This is inseparable from creating the material basis for a classless, socialist society, which can only be achieved on an international scale. The fight for women's liberation is in the interests of all the workers and oppressed of the world. These are some of the reasons why we say: **Women's liberation through socialist revolution!** ■

## Speak-Outs...

*continued from page 3*

class society, sexism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, the speaker explained, are tools used by the capitalist ruling class “to pit working people against each other.” The crowd cheered loudly in response to the concluding call for “women's liberation through working-class solidarity and revolution!”

Speakers at the UCLA event connected issues of abortion rights with the fight for socialist revolution, citing the 1917 October Revolution. “Courageous women workers were at the forefront of the greatest workers revolution in history, the Russian Revolution,” an Internationalist Group speaker noted. “Soviet Russia became the first country

in the world to permit abortion, free and on request, at all stages of pregnancy. And the revolution set out to provide women with 24-hour free childcare, communal kitchens, to free women from the drudgery of housework and childcare, which would become a collective task of society as a whole.”

Internationalist Club members and others at the speak-out also called for labor to come out in defense of the right to abortion and for the working class to defend the clinics. It was noted that the reason *Roe v. Wade* was granted in the first place was because of “massive social upheaval” in a context in which the U.S. was losing the war in Vietnam. After all those who wished to speak concluded, the crowd marched through campus chanting loudly.

Students, professors and many more thousands of people have come out against this brazen attack on women's rights, with massive protests cropping up all over the country. These attacks can't be fought with the Democrats, and the struggle is inseparably bound up with a fight to uproot and overcome the basis of women's oppression: class society and the building block of that oppression under capitalism, the institution of the bourgeois family. **For women's liberation through socialist revolution!** ■

**Revolution**



# “Heterogeneous Movement” or Revolutionary Class Struggle? Why History Matters in the Fight for Abortion Rights

The abortion rights crisis highlights a point revolutionaries consider crucial: political *clarity* is essential for *action* that advances the cause of the oppressed.<sup>1</sup> Thus genuine revolutionary education has always included learning to unravel significant political differences on the left. Today, as since the origins of the Marxist movement, it's an important part of the work of organizing and agitating for a revolutionary future.

An often-cited motto goes: “Educate, agitate, organize.” Some reformist groups repeat this today, but the slogan's origins lie in efforts to propagate (publish “propaganda” for) Marxist ideas in the late 1800s. Radical artist and poet William Morris and other leftists put it forward when they set up a group for that purpose in Britain; Karl Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor, soon became a

<sup>1</sup> This longstanding Marxist understanding was underscored by the first Trotskyist youth paper in the U.S., *Young Spartacus*, which, beginning with its first issue (December 1931), proclaimed “Clarity! Action!” on its masthead.

leading member. Liking the motto, Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin used it in one of his earliest polemical pamphlets (exposing populist leftists),<sup>2</sup> in which he quoted the German version popularized by veteran Marxist organizer Wilhelm Liebknecht.

A historic leader of revolutionary internationalist youth work was Liebknecht's son Karl. He became a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg, who was famous in the Marxist movement worldwide for her devastating attack on reformism and “the opportunist method,” *Reform or Revolution* (1900). Imprisoned for opposing the imperialist First World War, which the oppor-

<sup>2</sup> Lenin's biting 1894 polemic against radical populism, then the dominant trend in the Russian left, is still instructive today; see *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* (as Marxists were still known at that time). Lenin ends the pamphlet with a call for “open political struggle” to achieve “the victorious communist revolution” (all in capitals in the original).

tunist leaders backed, Karl and Rosa were later killed in January 1919 on their orders.

## Practitioners of the Opportunist Method

To get to the bottom of differences on the left that shape counterposed approaches to the abortion rights struggle, it's important to grasp a basic, long-standing fact about the U.S. left: what most of it keeps trying to do, on one burning issue after another, is pressure the Democratic Party. This characteristic American application of what Rosa Luxemburg called the opportunist method went into overdrive in recent years.

It takes a range of forms among different groups and currents. Numbers-wise, the biggest is the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), whose reason for existing is to rejuvenate and rope people into U.S. imperialism's Democratic Party. (For a brief period, some tried to claim that wasn't the case, but few stick to such pretenses today.) While the DSA has generally taken a back seat in recent

abortion rights protests, its growth amidst Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns and the 2016 election of Donald Trump had a big influence in accentuating and deepening the opportunism of the bulk of the left.

We of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth have forthrightly told the truth about the DSA all along, including when youth enthusiasm over its icons Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez et al. was at its height. In contrast, seeking to grow organizationally by ignoring basic principles of Marxism they claimed to uphold (like the political independence of the working class), a spectrum of groups to the left of the DSA opportunistically jumped on the bandwagon, helping spread illusions in the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America. Those groups include Socialist Alternative, the International Marxist Tendency and others.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Internationalist Group pamphlets *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (2018) and *Left Reformists in Existential Crisis* (2019).

## Sinister Symbiosis: Homophobic Bigotry and the Anti-Abortion Crusade

In the 1970s, as right-wingers seized on backlash against *Roe v. Wade* as a key part of their political strategy, this helped spur other reactionary movements. Among these was the vicious anti-gay campaign called “Save Our Children,” launched in 1977 by Anita Bryant, a born-again Christian who was the “brand ambassador” for the Florida orange juice industry. Its short-term goal was the attempted overturn of a Miami-area ordinance banning discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations. Whipping up this campaign for bigotry, Bryant ranted that children had to be “saved” from the supposed threat of gays and lesbians teaching in the schools. Like similar movements, it drew on the model of how the politicized Christian right cohered in the 1960s on the basis of racism against black people, to “save” white families from school integration and “save” society from secular education and the separation of church and state.

Today, backlash bigots vow to use the overturning of *Roe* as a jumping-off point for heightened attacks on gay, lesbian and trans rights. With the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision striking down *Roe* on June 24, a concurring opinion by arch-reactionary justice Clarence Thomas called for the court to revisit decisions on same-sex marriage and consensual sexual relations, as well as the right to have access to contraceptives. This is yet another way in which current events highlight how discrimination against gay, lesbian and trans people is connected to the oldest form of

social oppression: women's oppression.

To understand why these issues are so closely linked, Marxism provides essential insights.<sup>1</sup> The roots of women's oppression go back to the rise of class society. The central material basis of this oppression is women's subjugation in an institution – the family – whose functions let society's rulers pass on their property and ensure the raising of a workforce whose labor they can exploit and live off. Reactionary “defense” of this key institution of women's oppression and building block of capitalist society underlies discrimination against gay, lesbian and trans people. In the late 1800s, laws in a series of countries sought to uphold an exclusive so-called “normalcy” of man-on-woman sexuality and family life, targeting as “unnatural” people and practices falling outside those bounds, and criminalizing them as a supposed threat to “decency” and the social order. This is sometimes referred to as the institutionalization of anti-gay bigotry.<sup>2</sup>

In the U.S., the Cold War red scare was accompanied by a “lavender scare” against homosexuality. It was the civil rights and black freedom movements that broke up the deadening conformity and consensus of Cold War America. Bigots intent on reinforcing all manner of oppression built on the bedrock of U.S. racism and police repression. In 1967 Nina Simone gave voice to this reality in her powerful “Backlash Blues,” while the powers that be, and those who followed them, were freaking out as

<sup>1</sup> See “Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution,” *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See “Gay Rights and Socialist Revolution,” *Revolution* No. 4, September 2007.

challenges to racial oppression grew more radical and overlapped with increasing opposition to the U.S. war in Vietnam.

These events were part of the background for the emergence of the women's movement that started in the late '60s – and, after the Stonewall rebellion in the summer of '69, of groups like the Gay Liberation Front, whose name was modeled on Vietnam's National Liberation Front (“Viet Cong”). Challenges to segregation, to women's oppression and to traditional authority were opening the way to a push for gay, lesbian and trans rights, in which Stonewall participants like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were important figures.

In 1977, the politics of backlash was reflected in Anita Bryant's anti-gay campaign, an early example of reactionary “family values” crusades on hot-button social issues that became central to the growth of the religious right. This movement, a major force in U.S. politics today, was already underway at that time, during the first year of the Democratic administration of Jimmy Carter, elected president in 1976. As Carter pushed his post-Vietnam War, new Cold War agenda to rearm U.S. imperialism against the “Soviet threat” abroad, the home front saw a growing “moral rearmament” backlash on social issues. Anita Bryant's witch-hunting crusade was a virulent example of gay, lesbian and trans people being branded and ostracized as dangerous and “deviant,” a deviation from and threat to the bourgeois family structure that, as we have emphasized, is fundamental to the oppression of women, upheld as a bulwark of social order, authority and “values.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth discussion, see the Internationalist pamphlet *Marxism and Women's Liberation* (2017).

Mushrooming under Reagan, the religious right also worked overtime to build support for his escalation of bloody U.S. counterinsurgency against revolutionary struggles in Central America. Within the U.S., the backlash offensive repeatedly recycled rants about “saving” schools and children from supposedly evil teachers (a favorite theme for rightist censorship promoters and union-busters today). In the '80s this led to such horrific phenomena as the hysterical targeting of daycare workers at the McMartin Preschool in Los Angeles County. Beginning in 1983, this crazed witch hunt eventually led to the longest and most expensive criminal trial in U.S. history. The frame-up charges, based on eliciting phony “recovered memories,” involved bizarre claims that the school's teachers and staff were Satan-worshippers who had engaged in ritual sexual abuse of hundreds of children.

The defendants in the McMartin case were eventually acquitted on 52 counts, and those remaining resulted in a hung jury. But by that time countless lives and reputations had been destroyed, innumerable copycat prosecutions were carried out, and reactionary fears of women working outside the home had gotten a big boost. This too was part of the backlash politics wielding “defense of traditional family values” as a weapon against anything seen as a threat undermining women's subjugation to hearth, home and husband. Its echoes continue to reverberate today. ■



Then there is the grouping called Left Voice (LV), affiliated with an international current that calls itself the Trotskyist Fraction (FT from its initials in Spanish), whose main claim to fame is its role in a left electoralist front in Argentina. As the DSA's growth spurt took off after Trump's election, LV too sought to benefit from the illusions this entailed. As a number of LV members joined the DSA (heading up its New York Socialist Feminist Working Group for a while), they published pieces like "Anti-Trump Elections Signal Opening for Socialist Politics" (Left Voice, 10 November 2017), which begins with a blurb stating: "Progressive candidates and even socialist candidates did well in Tuesday's election. How can we use this to build a mass socialist movement?"

There was nothing in the slightest bit "socialist" about these candidates, DSA Democrats who help chain workers and youth to U.S. imperialism's Democratic Party of war and repression. But seeing a spike in enthusiasm for them in 2017, LV sought to "use this to build" its own niche. In pursuit of that goal, it combined leftist criticisms with helpful suggestions for the latest "movement" based on bourgeois politics.

This is the SOP (standard operating procedure) of a political current that since its origins has substituted maneuvers and gimmicks for basic Marxist principles.<sup>4</sup> The modus operandi is to present a package of opportunist politics and practices inside a shiny wrapper of "revolutionary" images and phrases.

### Left Voice: Reformist Coalitionism on Abortion Rights

Today, LV hopes that applying this modus operandi to the issue of abortion rights will help it hit the big time. While seeking to carve out a niche a bit to the left, it upholds the strategy of building a "mass heterogeneous [*sic*] movement," pointing to the "green wave" for abortion reform in several Latin American countries ("We Need a Mass Movement for Abortion Rights and We Need It Now," Left Voice, 4 September 2021). This cannot mean anything but class collaboration. That is what it has meant in Latin America.<sup>5</sup> And that's what it means in the U.S. context.

Let's take a look at how this plays out. When the draft decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* was leaked in May, the Democratic

<sup>4</sup> The FT's origins are in the Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist current led by the late Nahuel Moreno, notorious in the Latin American left for his endless unprincipled maneuvers going back to the 1950s, when the "Morenoites" joined and helped build the bourgeois nationalist party of General Juan Perón. While the FT claims to have transcended Morenoism, its political outlook, approach and methods continually show that it has not.

<sup>5</sup> In Argentina, partial legalization of abortion was carried out in 2020 through a bill introduced by the governing Peronist party. It was backed by the "Green Tide" movement led by bourgeois feminists, including followers of Argentina's Peronist Vice President Cristina Fernández Kirchner, with the left in tow, including the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas, which leads the FT, and its "socialist feminist" group Pan y Rosas (Bread and Roses). In such "heterogeneous" class-collaborationist movements, the bourgeois elements hold the reins. The reform was a limited gain, but the 14-week limit on the right to abortion stipulated by the Argentine law is more restrictive than that of the Mississippi law ("Act to Prohibit Abortion After 15 Weeks") approved in the Supreme Court's recent decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and far less than the 23-24 week standard in the U.S. prior to the court's reactionary ruling. See "The Struggle for Full Abortion Rights, From Latin America to the U.S.," *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022.



**Karl Liebknecht (left), at 1918 Berlin rally, and Rosa Luxemburg (right), addressing meeting during 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International. Revolutionary internationalists imprisoned for opposing imperialist World War One, Karl and Rosa were murdered in 1919 at the behest of Social Democratic leaders.**

Party moved into high gear to use this to round up votes, particularly for the midterm elections. Non-profits and NGOs ("non-governmental" organizations) loyal to the Democrats built on previous such efforts like the Women's March held after Trump's election in 2017. On May 14, they organized protests around the country, including a large "Bans Off Our Bodies" protest in New York City, called by Women's March, MoveOn, etc., which marched across the Brooklyn Bridge. The Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth did not march in this pro-Democrat mobilization, instead selling our revolutionary press with literature tables under the banner "Free Abortion on Demand – Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution – Break with the Democrats, Build a Workers Party." We distributed a leaflet headlined "To Win Abortion Rights Fight, Pro-Democrat Marches Are a Dead End," which emphasized:

"Democrats are 'faux' friends of women. This party of war and mass incarceration seeks women's votes, but buries legislation to defend their rights. As Internationalist youth emphasized at recent speak-outs in New York and Los Angeles, *what's needed is mass mobilization bringing out the power of the multiracial working class, fighting for the full and unrestricted right to abortion. For free abortion on demand!*"

In contrast, Left Voice and several other groups built a "Socialist Feminist con-



tingent of the #BansOffOurBodies protest," marching in the May 14 pro-Democrat demonstration in NYC. The contingent centered on a political bloc between LV and Socialist Alternative (SAlt). A much bigger, aggressively reformist group, which has partly joined the DSA, SAlt is best known for its frenetic promotion of Bernie Sanders' Democratic presidential campaigns. Many abortion rights activists are angry at the Democrats for not enacting a pro-abortion law, so LV carried glossy green printed banners reading "We won't go back! For a federal law for free safe abortion on demand." (It's doubtful even LV actually believes free abortion on demand will be won by campaigning for such a federal law, which has a snowball's chance in hell of going through the U.S. bourgeois political set-up, but the idea is to build on the illusions...)

The whole panorama at this march manifested the underlying political reality: pressuring the Democrats remains the name of the game. As they march in demonstrations tailored to the program and goals of feminist Democrats, LV, SAlt & Co. – despite sometimes vociferous critiques of the Dems – build a de facto alliance with them. As for LV's bloc with the Bernie boosters of SAlt, it has continued, and was on full display on the platform during the large NYC protest their bloc built on June 24.

Lest LV claim that the above exemplifies unjust exaggerations by "ultra-left sec-

tarians" (the standard opportunist term for actual Trotskyists), let's take a look at what they themselves wrote on the day after the Brooklyn Bridge march.

On May 15, Left Voice published a statement that combined enthusing over the pro-Democratic protest with some left criticisms of its organizers. "This massive protest was part of the #BansOffOurBodies nation-wide day of action called for by the Women's March Foundation and Planned Parenthood. These nonprofits that are allied with the Democratic Party were forced into action due to the immense rage and desire to mobilize by people all over the country," LV wrote. It stated: "Despite what Planned Parenthood and the Women's March organizers say, voting Democrat in November is a losing plan; voting Democrat hasn't worked and it won't work."

But then came the actual political punchline:

"The non-profits, unions, and left-wing organizations who mobilized yesterday will need a national plan of action that includes more mass mobilizations, walk-outs, sickouts, strikes, and direct action to defend *Roe v. Wade*.... [This] means demanding that Planned Parenthood and other non-profits put their immense resources at the service of a massive battle in the streets for abortion rights like we saw in Argentina and Ireland. That is the only serious plan of action to defend the national right to an abortion."

– "Over 20,000 March in New York City for Abortion Rights," Left Voice, 15 May

So while criticizing non-profits that the Democrats use to subordinate protests to bourgeois politics, LV then *calls for making a "national plan of action" with those very same organizations, and for them to use their "resources" for (i.e., fund) the resulting movement.* The call for class collaboration is clear. This kind of politics has major real-world consequences, as seen in innumerable social movements here (and in the 14-week limitation on the right to abortion gained in Argentina).

In all such cross-class, "heterogeneous" alliances, what is and isn't acceptable to bourgeois forces will determine the direction, limits and eventual outcome of the movement. When some leftist language is included in the mix, its actual political function is to make pitches for class collaboration appear more palatable to those unenthused by standard liberal mainstream appeals.

Left Voice was founded not as an organization seeking to build a Leninist party on a clearly delineated programmatic basis, but as an "independent media outlet" giving voice to "activists with many viewpoints and from many traditions" – a kind of broad tent pitched to the left of the DSA's while adjoining it. After carrying out a variety of entrism into the DSA, backing a red-banning clique that LV promoted as leaders of a supposed "Rank and File Revolt at CUNY,"<sup>6</sup> and other exercises in rank opportunism, LV now hopes to get rich quick organizationally in the abortion rights milieu.

A striking aspect is that the opportunist method they apply in this effort is the same as what the ultra-reformist Socialist Workers Party did in the Vietnam-era anti-war movement, which Left Voice hails.



**Democratic National Convention, July 1972. NYC Congresswoman Bella Abzug (in hat), Ms. magazine founder (and CIA "asset") Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan (speaking) at Women's Caucus meeting. Earlier that year, they featured as endorsers of the popular-front Women's National Abortion Action Coalition built by the ex-Trotskyist SWP.**

<sup>6</sup> See "How They Rammed Through Anti-Red Ban," *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019, and "Response to 'Left Voice' Supporters: Real Reds Don't Bow to Anti-Communist Bans," *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021.





Heroic National Liberation Front (“Viet Cong”) and North Vietnamese combatants fought and won against U.S. war machine. Vietnam’s victory against imperialism inspired workers and oppressed around the world.

### Some Lessons from the Vietnam War

In the U.S. left, the question of what political lessons should be drawn from the Vietnam War, and the mass protests against it, remains a key dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics.<sup>7</sup> The implications and lessons have remained highly relevant, and this is definitely the case today.

As the United States escalated its genocidal war against social revolution in the mid-1960s, and endless marches for “peace” failed to stop it, many young people began to grasp the nature of U.S. imperialism. Increasing numbers came to see that the war of the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants was just, and to desire the *defeat* of “our own” rulers in Vietnam.

Reformist sectors of the left pushed back hard against this. They worked to build an “antiwar movement” tailored to bourgeois “doves” – capitalist politicians who, seeking votes, said they opposed the war – and the patriotic appeals to U.S. national interest that were the liberals’ stock in trade. This approach was nothing new for the old-line Communist Party, which echoed the fruitless appeals for peaceful coexistence with imperialism pumped out by the Soviet bureaucracy in line with Stalin’s dogma of “socialism in one country.” But in the antiwar field during the 1960s and early ’70s, the CP was often outstripped by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

Formerly Trotskyist but by then a stone-cold reformist organization, the SWP made building such a movement its trademark strategy. In 1970 they established the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). Calling for “the broadest coalition possible,” the SWP pitched this as a movement that would bring in all those who accepted the call for the withdrawal of U.S. forces (“Out Now”) from Vietnam. In other words, it was designed to be “heterogeneous” in class terms, uniting liberal bourgeois forces with ostensible socialists. NPAC was a *popular front of class collaboration*, made to fit the goal of bringing in bourgeois forces. Cynically, the SWP was then still claiming to be Trotskyist – but the program of Lenin and Trotsky is based on *intransigent revolutionary class struggle*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See “Vietnam: A Historic Defeat for U.S. Imperialism,” *Revolution* No. 15, September 2018, and “U.S. Imperialism’s War Crimes and Mass Murder in Vietnam,” *Revolution* No. 10, October 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See Internationalist pamphlet, *The Popular Front: Roadblock to Revolution* (2007); and *The Road to Peace: According to Stalin and According to Lenin* (1951) by U.S. Trotskyism’s founder James P. Cannon.

Through NPAC, the SWP reached what it saw as the big time, getting to share the platform with Democratic “doves” at mass demonstrations. This meant keeping everything strictly “peaceful, legal” and respectable, while anything that would challenge the class interests of bourgeois allies was denounced as “ultraleft.” Meanwhile, the insistence on “Out Now” as the common denominator for protests reflected the fact that some Democratic pols – and some liberal Republicans (there was such a thing back then) – had begun talking about withdrawal from Vietnam to cut U.S. losses as the prospect of defeat there grew. In this context, the nature and parameters of the official “antiwar movement” were going to have major consequences.

Starting in the late ’60s and early ’70s, right-wing Republican president Richard Nixon began withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam – while intensifying mass murder from the air through the intensive bombings first ordered by his Democratic predecessor Lyndon Johnson. The draft was winding down. And with more and more U.S. troops “out,” now the large-scale antiwar movement ebbed away. Its activists largely flowed into the presidential campaign of Democratic imperialist “dove” George McGovern.

The dirty U.S. colonial war against Vietnam was not “stopped” by the liberal/reformist antiwar movement, despite appeals to “Give Peace a Chance” and the sickly-sweet mythology we’re so often taught. The U.S. imperialists were finally *defeated* by the heroic Vietnamese fighters, and this defeat for imperialism was an enormous victory for the working class and oppressed people all around the world. Upholding Vietnam-era coalition politics as a supposed model for radicals isn’t just drawing wrong lessons from past history today. What it means in practice is laying the groundwork and rehearsing the pretexts for class collaboration tomorrow.

### Popular Frontism in Practice

With the growth of a new women’s movement demanding an end to anti-abortion laws, the SWP sought to create a new “broadest coalition possible” in the mold of the NPAC popular front. In 1971, it launched the Women’s National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC). Here again, seeking respectability with Democratic politicians was key to the strategy. Thus, WONAAC helped set the pattern of tailoring language to “choice” while limiting demands to “Repeal All Abortion Laws” – rather than unrestricted, free abortion on demand.

# Socialist Workers Set Presidential Campaign

## Halstead, Boutelle To Run

NEW YORK, Aug. 30 — The national committee of the Socialist Workers Party announced here today that it has nominated Fred Halstead, a leader of the New York antiwar movement, and Paul Boutelle, a Harlem black power spokesman, as the party’s candidates for President and Vice President respectively.

The announcement was made at a press conference held at the headquarters of the Socialist

**THE GHETTO REVOLT.**  
For a special analysis  
see page 5



**Socialist Workers Party’s Militant (4 September 1967) launches social-patriotic presidential campaign of Fred Halstead. In sharp contrast, revolutionaries stood for victory to heroic Viet Cong. Halstead later headed SWP’s antiwar popular front NPAC, led goon squad against reds.**

As 1972, an election year, began, WONAAC’s endorsers list was headed up by liberal Democrat Bella Abzug. It also featured prominent Georgia Democrat Julian Bond as well as Shirley Chisholm, who like Abzug was a congresswoman from NYC (Chisholm unsuccessfully sought the Democratic presidential nomination that year), together with the Southern California branch of the Women’s Political Caucus, “Dear Abby” advice columnist Abigail Van Buren – and two of the bourgeois feminism’s most famous icons: Betty Friedan and Ms. magazine founder Gloria Steinem.<sup>9</sup>

In July of that year, Abzug, Friedan and Steinem met up in Miami Beach at the 1972 Democratic National Convention. There, floor leaders of liberal South Dakota senator George McGovern’s quest for the party’s presidential nomination quashed all efforts to include a reference to reproductive rights (even when omitting the word “abortion”) in the party platform, arguing that it would cost the candidate votes. When a woman delegate interrupted a speech by McGovern to protest this, and he drowned her out, “Bella and Gloria stared glassily out into the room, as if they were deaf or entranced” notes Germaine Greer’s lengthy cover story on the episode in *Harper’s Magazine* (October 1972). As the convention went on, Friedan and others pitched in to give “tactical” cover for waiting ’til the next convention, in order to ensure smooth sailing for McGovern (who got the nomination but lost to Nixon). Of course, abortion rights remained a political football for the bourgeois politicians. And in ’76, as discussed in our front-page article, the Dems’ made abortion opponent and Hyde Amendment backer Jimmy Carter their candidate.

As for WONAAC, to the SWP’s disappointment, it never got as much traction as NPAC. In part this was due to some of the SWP’s desired feminist bloc partners launching a red-baiting campaign that essentially read the SWP out of the abortion rights movement led by the National Organization for Women and National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (now called NARAL Pro-Choice America). After the Supreme Court’s *Roe* decision in 1973, that movement basically dissipated, except for the eternal push to vote Democratic. The Dems even abandoned the Equal Rights Amendment, which passed both houses of Congress in 1972, even though by 1977 the ERA had 35 of the 38 necessary ratifications by the states.

Yet the class-collaborationist model trademarked by the SWP in those years continues to resonate with opportunist groups today, including most of those falsely claiming to be Trotskyist. It’s really no accident that Left Voice repeatedly harks back to it.<sup>10</sup> To pick one pretty incredible example, it used a long piece titled “Leon Trotsky Lives on in Our American Struggle” (Left Voice, 21 August 2020) to rhapsodize about how “the SWP was the force behind the largest anti-war mobilizations during the Vietnam War – organized on a clear anti-imperialist line without succumbing to the ultraleft sectarianism of some small groups....” Overcome with enthusiasm for the good old days of NPAC peace crawls, it says “the spirit of Trotsky was marching beside us.” Beyond ludicrous, this is grotesque. Not only was the SWP’s class collaboration with bourgeois politicians the *opposite* of what Trotsky stood for, but it regularly excluded forces calling for the victory of the Vietnamese Communists against U.S. imperialism from antiwar marches.

Another Left Voice piece (4 May 2020) goes out of its way to hail “Fred Halstead, a Trotskyist [*sic*], SWP leader, longtime activist at the center of the antiwar movement, and the party’s presidential candidate in 1968.” Author of the SWP’s official story of the antiwar movement, *Out Now! A Participant’s Account of the Movement Against the Vietnam*

<sup>10</sup> It is relevant to note here that up to the late 1970s, the SWP was closely aligned with Nahuel Moreno’s group in Argentina.



War [1978]), Halstead was a key organizer and leader of NPAC. To say that he was a virulent proponent of its class-collaborationist strategy would be an understatement.

The same May 2020 LV article lauds the SWP for insisting that “Bring the Troops Home Now” and “Out Now” be the basis of its “antiwar movement.” It even characterizes these as “anti-imperialist slogans.” This is the logic of apologists for reformism seeking yet again to put a left spin on class collaboration. There’s a political purpose for prettifying this history: preparing the next round of such “mass heterogenous movements.” Additionally, the kind of politics pushed by Halstead’s SWP in the Vietnam era, which Left Voice advertises as a model today, can run into problems with youth who start checking out for themselves what Lenin and Trotsky stood for – and against. Slapping on a left-sounding label can sometimes divert them, at least for a while. (This too is from the SWP playbook: NPAC is no popular front, they swore; it may be a coalition with bourgeois politicians, but it’s ... a “united front”! And “Out Now” is ... “anti-imperialist”!)

As for Left Voice harking back to Fred Halstead’s SWP presidential campaign, this too speaks volumes. Halstead’s 1968 campaign was launched with a photo of him carrying a poster reading “Support Our Boys – Bring Them Home Now.” This was a classic example of what Lenin called “social-patriotism”: supposed socialists appealing to the patriotism pushed by their “own” bourgeois rulers. NPAC even made sure that its National Steering Committee included a number of bourgeois politicians; the most prominent was Vance Hartke, Democratic senator (1959-77) from Indiana.

But building a coalition with bourgeois forces requires clamping down on leftist opponents of class collaboration. In the summer of ’71, SWP/NPAC leader Halstead achieved a new level of notoriety on the radical left. It was then, during an NPAC conference held at Hunter College, that Halstead led a bloody goon squad assault against leftists – whom the reformist SWP constantly denounced as sectarians and ultraleftists – for loudly objecting to Senator Vance Hartke of the imperialist Democratic Party being a keynote speaker at the “antiwar” conference.

Against the SWP’s class collaborationism, genuine Trotskyists fought for “Labor Strikes Against the War.” Needless to say, this was anathema to bourgeois politicians. While the SWP hewed to “Out Now” in its quest to bring more bourgeois “peace”-talkers into NPAC, actual anti-imperialists refused to limit slogans to withdrawal and *took a side* in the class war of revolution vs. counterrevolution. Trotskyism – represented at that time by the Spartacist tendency – meant drawing the *class line* and raising the banner of “Victory to the Vietnam Revolution” and “All Indochina Must Go Communist!” Against collaboration with imperialist “doves,” revolutionaries explained that “our boys” were the heroic workers and peasants of the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front).<sup>11</sup> And in that period, within even the ranks of the imperialist armed forces, growing numbers of working-

<sup>11</sup> See the chapter on “The Struggle Against Class Collaborationism in the Anti-War Movement” in the 1976 Spartacist pamphlet *Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam*. Established by leaders of the SWP’s Revolutionary Tendency expelled from the party in 1963-64, the Spartacist League (SL) upheld the Trotskyist program for three decades. Its sharp degeneration in the wake of the destruction of the Soviet Union later led it to abandon and largely renounce its own revolutionary past, and it currently seems close to collapse.

class, African American and Latino soldiers and sailors were saying that the “other side” should win.<sup>12</sup>

The lessons of this history are of great importance today. Clarity on the political issues posed by these struggles is crucial. The call for a common “national plan” with Democratic Party “nonprofits” et al. (fueled by these bourgeois organizations’ “resources,” no less) has a long tradition – of class collaboration – counterposed to what is needed to *win* the fight for full abortion rights.

Our task is to help put into practice the Marxist program, as this is essential to defending the most basic rights – and gaining the actual liberation – of all the oppressed. That program highlights that *winning the unrestricted right to free abortion on demand requires unchaining the power of class struggle*. Breaking the chains that bind the workers and oppressed to politicians, parties and institutions of the ruling class is crucial in the fight for women’s liberation through socialist revolution. ■

<sup>12</sup> This is shown in the documentary *Sir! No Sir! The Hidden History of the GI Movement Against the Vietnam War* (2005).

## Furnish the War...

*continued from page 1*

“Remember the Maine, To Hell with Spain!” The slogan harked back to “Remember the Alamo,” the motto for the 1846-48 war in which U.S. forces under Democratic president James Polk seized almost half of Mexico. In 1898, “Remember the *Maine*” became the motto for the “splendid little war” (as Teddy Roosevelt’s sidekick John Hay called it) in which the U.S. occupied Cuba and seized Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam outright as colonies from the decrepit Spanish empire.

The Hearst press was in the front lines of the media war that sold the public back home – traditionally trained to contrast the U.S. with the old empires of Europe — on this bloody crusade of colonial conquest. It showered the U.S. public with images and stories, especially of crazed and bloodthirsty Spaniards wantonly targeting Cuban women and children. Clearly, it proclaimed, Uncle Sam had to save them from the forces of evil incarnate. If official “news” hit a dry spell, Hearst made his own, like the saga of “the most beautiful girl on the island of Cuba,” Evangelina Cisneros, whom a reporter for Hearst’s *New York Journal* allegedly rescued, with swashbuckling feats of heroism, from Spanish imprisonment.

In the Philippines, meanwhile, the U.S. military annihilated hundreds of thousands in a scorched-earth counterinsurgency campaign that set the pattern for the genocidal onslaughts it carried out against Korea and Vietnam decades later. This included the massive use of torture (particularly the “water cure,” as waterboarding was called at that time), concentration camps, and the infamous order to turn Samar province into “a howling wilderness” and “kill everyone over the age of ten.”

In his notorious hymn to U.S. imperialism, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), British colonialist Rudyard Kipling, outspoken in his racism, saluted Uncle Sam’s new conquests. In the U.S., the capitalist media went all-out in marketing the dollar empire’s onslaught as a noble crusade for freedom and so-called civilization. As part of this campaign, endless cartoons showed “the enemy” as a ravenous beast. Just two years before the war, the Supreme Court had issued its “separate but equal” *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision

“Against the all-sided pro-imperialist ‘solidarity with Ukraine’ war propaganda, the League for the Fourth International calls for *revolutionary defeatism on both sides* of the reactionary nationalist Russia-Ukraine war, for *revolutionary struggle against the capitalist rulers in Moscow and Kiev*, and to *defeat the U.S./NATO war drive* pointing to World War III against Russia and China” (“Imperialist Racism and the Russia-Ukraine War,” *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022).



Button with image from “Remember the Maine” poster promoting 1898 U.S. imperialist war with Spain that led to seizure of Puerto Rico, Philippines, Guam and occupation of Cuba.

(1896). Racist caricatures of African Americans that were used on a massive scale to sell Jim Crow ideology were now recycled by the capitalist press, to dehumanize and ridicule U.S. imperialism’s new colonial subjects overseas, whom Kipling brazenly called “your new-caught, sullen peoples.”

The Hearst press had played first fiddle in the enterprise of preparing, hyping and justifying the Spanish-American War. Yet its efforts were dwarfed by what would soon occur. The First World War was around the corner. As Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin explained in his essential *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), the development of monopoly capital had led to the ruthless carving up of the world among the dominant, richest capitalist countries. Now the decline of some of the old powers, and the rise of new ones – among them Germany, Japan and the U.S. – led to a new war, on a previously unimagined scale, for the redivision of the world.

This first imperialist World War broke out in the summer of 1914. While reformist social democrats supported “their own” capitalist governments and helped them recruit cannon fodder for the slaughter, German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht raised the slogan “The Main Enemy Is at Home!” Calling to “turn the imperialist war into a civil war,” Lenin pointed the way for ending capitalist wars once and for all when, together with Leon Trotsky, he led the Russian Revolution in 1917.

### To “Shape and Train a Nation for War”

In the U.S., Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected U.S. president in 1912. Rivaling Teddy Roosevelt in his virulent racism, Wilson screened the KKK propaganda film *Birth of a Nation* in the White House. When the war began, his administration backed Britain, France and Russia (then under the rule of the Tsar) against their imperialist rivals in

the “Central Powers” headed up by Germany. Billions in U.S. loans helped finance the war effort of the British and French colonial empires. Yet the U.S. public had little appetite for entanglement in the European conflict. In 1916 Wilson ran again, on the slogan “He Kept Us Out of War,” and won reelection.

The problem Wilson now faced: how to prepare the population for the U.S. entering the war. The British ocean liner *Lusitania*, carrying over 170 tons of munitions together with civilian passengers, including some

Americans, had been sunk the previous year by Germany (which had warned it would attack the ship). Thus “Remember the *Lusitania*!” would eventually factor into the U.S. *casus belli* (pretext for war), together with the January 1917 “Zimmermann telegram” in which Germany invited Mexico to join its side in the conflict in order to regain territory the U.S. had seized in the Mexican-American War.

In March 1917, less than a month after being inaugurated for his second term as president, Wilson addressed Congress with a call for the U.S. to declare war on Germany. Needless to say, he did not declare that the goal was for U.S. imperialism, having defeated Spain two decades previously, to now become the dominant capitalist power on a world scale. Instead, he said the war, which had already piled up tens of millions of corpses, was “to make the world itself at last free” and – one of history’s best-known war-marketing slogans – “safe for democracy.”

Snapping to attention, Congress declared war and voted billions to build up the armed forces. In a proclamation on draft registration, Wilson stated: “It is not an army that we must shape and train for war – it is a nation.” Since conscripting soldiers for the army was the purpose of his May 1917 proclamation (followed the next day by Congress passing the Selective Service Act), the phrase might seem a bit odd.

Yet the U.S. imperialist chief was dead serious when he called to *shape and train the nation for war*. This was precisely Wilson’s purpose when weeks earlier he issued an executive order establishing the Committee on Public Information (CPI), which, despite its innocuous name, would become in effect his ministry of war propaganda. “*Forging a white-hot war-will*” was how CPI head George Creel described its mission. A journalist and Democratic Party activist, Creel was appointed after three cabinet members – the secretaries of State, War

**Revolution**





Still from Korean War-era U.S. Air Force film that threatened nuclear destruction of “enemy” cities, stating U.S. should “not hesitate” to use this “destructive power” if “necessary.” (From 1982 documentary *The Atomic Cafe*.)

and the Navy – urged the president to recruit a civilian who could “gain the understanding of the press.” They further recommended that in the CPI, “the two functions – censorship and publicity – be joined in honesty and profit.” (Three guesses as to which of the latter would prevail.)

Working together with its Division of “News,” the CPI’s special Bureau of War Photographs and Division of Pictures (created by another of Wilson’s executive orders) followed Hearst’s admonition to “Furnish the Pictures” in order to help furnish the war. The CPI’s functions and operations were amazingly far-reaching. As one study on the subject notes:

“For its domestic program (there was also a foreign section that eventually had offices in over 30 countries), the CPI took advantage of every existing communications link between Washington’s wartime policies and every identifiable segment of the American people – and forged new ones. The CPI prepared press releases and news stories by the bushelful and enlisted scholars to write propaganda pamphlets.... It then printed and distributed them by the tens of millions.”

The same study observes that in addition to organizing a network of tens of thousands of speechmakers (known as the Four-Minute Men),

“The CPI ... placed advertisements in hundreds of newspapers and magazines; designed, printed, and distributed untold numbers of posters, which were pasted up all over the country; produced its own film documentaries and rigidly controlled the content of Hollywood-made motion pictures; published a daily newspaper; ran war expositions and scheduled lecturers; prepared collateral publicity and advertising material such as photographs, slides, cartoons, and postcards. Behind the scenes, CPI ghost writers quietly wrote newspaper stories, magazine articles, and books.”<sup>1</sup>

All this is eerily familiar in 2022, though today’s unending war-drive propaganda frenzy incorporates countless newer media outlets and technologies. Like William Randolph Hearst’s infamous *New York Journal* back in the day, the modernized media chorus serves the imperialist masters of war.<sup>2</sup> Right-wing rags like the

<sup>1</sup> Stewart Halsey Ross, *Propaganda for War: How the United States Was Conditioned to Fight the Great War of 1914-1918* (2009).

<sup>2</sup> The song “Masters of War” (Bob Dylan, 1962) came out shortly after JFK threatened to blow up the world in the Cuban Missile Crisis. You can listen to it online at [youtube.com/watch?v=JEmI\\_FT4YHU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEmI_FT4YHU)

Murdoch empire’s low-rent *Post* pitch in with old war horses like the liberal *New York Times*, whose motto might as well be: “All the U.S. War Propaganda That Fits, We Print.” And now it seems there’s virtually no escape, almost any time you look at a screen of any kind, listen to so-called news, get inundated with memes, reels or the latest idiotic barrage of ads, and so forth – *ad nauseam*.

### “Poor Little Belgium”

The CPI brought patriotic imagery and flag-waving sloganeering into the service of signing up soldiers and selling “Liberty” war bonds. It was joined in the war-promotion biz by many private companies and public organizations. Both aggressive jingoism and somber sentimental appeals were employed. The most famous of all was the poster of Uncle Sam pointing at the viewer with the message “I Want You for U.S. Army,” while one for kids proclaimed: “Boys and Girls! You can help your Uncle Sam Win the War. Save Your Quarters – Buy War Savings Stamps.”

As in the Spanish-American War, images and slogans about saving women and children were often featured. When Germany headed to attack the French army as WWI began, its troops invaded Belgium, which though a colonial power in its own right, was a much smaller country. “‘Poor little Belgium,’ martyred by the German invader,” the *International Encyclopedia of the First World War* notes, “became an effective symbol for international belligerents to sharpen their propaganda weapons.” (“Gallant Belgium” and “brave little Belgium” were popular variants.)

Alert to the opportunities, the British government’s War Propaganda Bureau (yes, that was its real name) pumped out a steady stream of atrocity stories – for example, that German troops were in the habit of bayoneting Belgian babies – which the U.S. media eagerly took up. A major objective was to promote the idea that Britain, the U.S. and their allies were waging the war to “defend poor little Belgium.” A range of different CPI posters urged “Remember Belgium,” with over a million copies printed of the most famous one, featuring a prominent artist’s silhouetted representation of the German Kaiser abducting a young woman.<sup>3</sup> A decade before WWI, an international outcry had broken out against the colonialist genocide Belgium carried in the Congo, which had been turned into a vast rub-

<sup>3</sup> Erik Van Schaack, “The Division of Pictorial Publicity in World War I,” *Design Issues*, Winter 2006.

ber plantation by Belgium’s King Léopold II.<sup>4</sup> So it took some work for the CPI to sell the image of Belgium as one of the “good guys” in the official U.S. war story for WWI.

Posters luridly depicting the need to protect women and children here “at home” from an imaginary German invasion of the U.S. were produced in many variants. These were often paired with pictures and slogans against “the Hun,” a slur adopted by the British and U.S. governments as a national-chauvinist term interchangeably used for Germany, the German Kaiser, or German people. “Hun or Home?” asked one poster. “Beat Back the Hun with Liberty Bonds,” urged another from the Division of Pictorial Publicity. Yet another showed a young man getting ready to sign up for the Marine Corps, having just read a headline stating “Huns Kill Women and Children!”

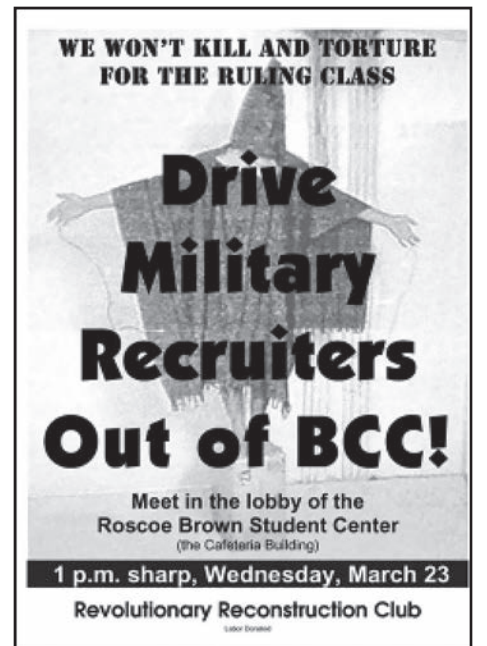
Best known today is the lurid poster depicting Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm (grandson of Britain’s Queen Victoria) as a ravenous ape in the act of carrying away a half-nude blond woman. The poster declaimed: “Destroy this Mad Brute – Enlist.” Today, an anti-China version of the same grotesque image and slogan – available as a sticker, t-shirt (including kid’s size), mug, magnet or mask – is being hawked online, whipping up deadly “yellow peril” racism and anti-communism in line with the escalating U.S. war drive.

The year before Wilson took the U.S. into WWI, over 100,000 people marched in a “Preparedness Parade” in New York City featuring a banner demanding “Absolute and Unqualified Loyalty to Our Country.” Former president Teddy Roosevelt spearheaded a campaign for “100 percent Americanism.” Accusations of “un-American” beliefs or behavior – prefiguring the Cold War McCarthyite crusade – helped fuel mob attacks and state repression. Prominent targets included the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, also known as the Wobblies), whose courageous “free speech fights” challenging censorship and police tyranny had begun well before the war. In 1915 the great IWW song writer Joe Hill was executed on a frame-up murder charge by the state of Utah. In 1916, the sheriff of Everett, Washington led hired vigilantes in a massacre against Wobbly activists during a militant shingle workers strike.

### Imperialist War Abroad, Repression on the Home Front

Not long after the U.S. declared war in 1917, federal agents raided almost 50 IWW halls across the country. Frank Little, a famous Wobbly organizer who called himself “1/2 white, 1/2 Indian, all IWW,” was lynched in Butte, Montana after giving speeches against the war. A June 1918 speech against the war, censorship and repression that veteran Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs gave in Canton, Ohio led to his arrest and conviction under the Espionage Act, which Wilson had signed into law after the U.S. joined WWI. In 1918 the Espionage Act was expanded by the Sedition Act, which made it illegal to “willfully utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of the Government of the United States” or to “willfully

<sup>4</sup> A widely-read exposé of Belgium’s colonial crimes was Mark Twain’s 1906 pamphlet *King Leopold’s Soliloquy* (1906). See “Mark Twain and the Onset of the Imperialist Epoch” and “U.S. Was Godfather of Colonial Enslavement of the Congo,” *The Internationalist* No. 3, September-October 1997, as well as “‘Human Rights Imperialism’ and the Congo Holocaust,” *The Internationalist* No. 9, January-February 2001.



Flier for Revolutionary Reconstruction Club (RRC) protest against military recruiters at Bronx Community College, March 2005. In 2004, images of U.S. soldiers torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq were made public, prompting widespread outrage and demonstrations against the war. RRC joined in forming CUNY Internationalist Clubs and in launching *Revolution* in 2003.

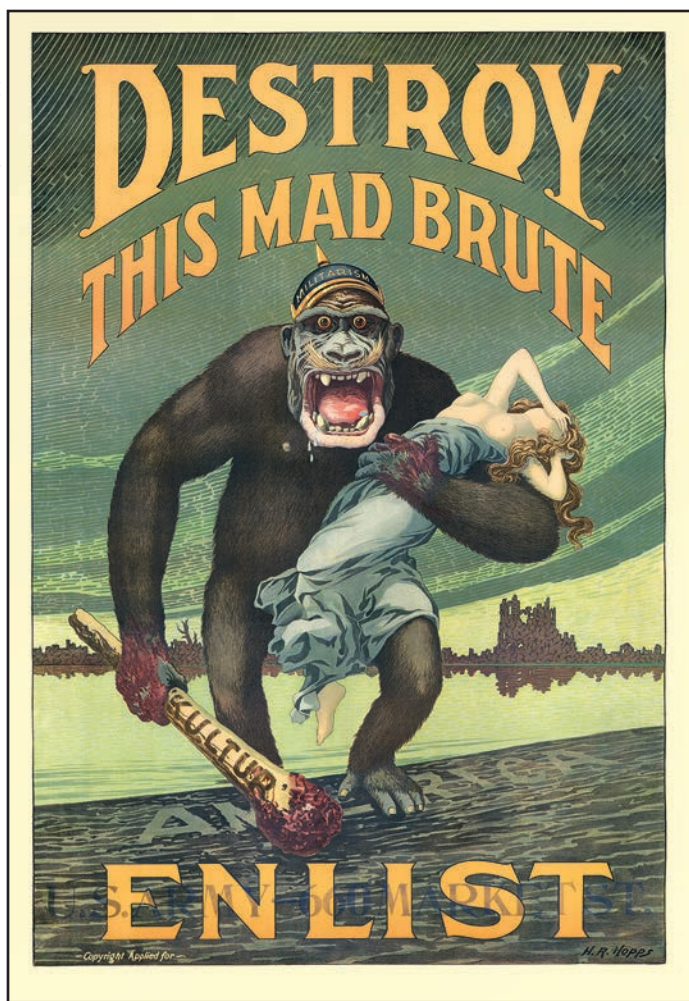
urge, incite, or advocate any curtailment of the production” of the things “necessary or essential to the prosecution of the war.”

At least 1,000 people were convicted under the Espionage and Sedition acts. In a series of cases, the Supreme Court specifically upheld the convictions of Debs and other leftists. These included the case of Jacob Abrams in New York City, who was part of a group of immigrant left activists sentenced to long prison terms for distributing leaflets that called on workers to strike in opposition to U.S. military intervention against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. While the Sedition Act was eventually repealed, many parts of the original Espionage Act remain in force, and it was used in 1973 to charge Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers (giving the inside story of the U.S. war against Vietnam); charges against him were finally dismissed. More recently, the Act has been used against Edward Snowden, who leaked documents about the large-scale National Security Agency surveillance program in 2013. In 2019, federal charges against Wikileaks founder Julian Assange – for exposing U.S. war crimes and intelligence agency “dirty tricks” – included 17 counts of violation of the Espionage Act.<sup>5</sup>

Oddly, back in 1917, in a case known as *The United States v. Motion Picture Film “The Spirit of ’76,”* the Espionage Act was used against a silent movie of that title, whose producer Richard Goldstein declared that he was just trying to make a flag-waving, “Yankee Doodle Dandy” tear-jerker about the American Revolution. The judge denounced the film for depicting the July 1778 massacre of hundreds of colonists in Pennsylvania by the British army, as well as scenes involving the bayoneting of a Yankee baby and “other unspeakable atrocities committed by British soldiers, including the shooting of harmless women, the dragging off, sometimes by the hair of the head, of young American girls,

<sup>5</sup> See “Espionage Act of 1917,” online First Amendment Encyclopedia (August 2022) and “Free Julian Assange – No Extradition, U.S. Hands Off Edward Snowden,” *The Internationalist* No. 62, January-March 2021.





**U.S. Army recruitment poster (circa 1917) uses anti-German propaganda themes to sell U.S. joining World War I, depicting “the enemy” (Germany) as rabid beast invading shores of America, carrying off damsel in distress.**

etc.” He explained that while in the 1770s “we were at war with Great Britain during the Revolutionary times,” in 1917 “we are engaged in a war in which Great Britain is an ally of the United States.” A film like this could have the “effect of sowing dissension among our people, and of creating animosity or want of confidence between us and our allies,” His Honor proclaimed.<sup>6</sup> Goldstein got a 10-year sentence.

Jingoist culture purges, repression and the relentless din of war propaganda emerge time and again as links in the unending chain of wars that the U.S. has carried out or promoted from before the Spanish-American War to WWI (which Woodrow Wilson pitched as “the war to end all wars”) and down to the present day. Building on methods employed by William Randolph Hearst in the build-up for the 1898 war, George Creel’s CPI developed and honed techniques during the imperialist First World War. As one of the many in-depth books on the subject notes: “In World War II, during the cold war, and through the Vietnam era, the propaganda machine set into motion by George Creel in 1917-1918 continued to grind.”<sup>7</sup>

**Fast forward to the 21st century.** Millions of Gen Z youth heading back to school this fall were born amidst a conflict – the Iraq

War (2003-11) – in which U.S. imperialism’s war propaganda merchants played a huge role in paving the way for death and destruction on a massive scale. Yet if we surveyed U.S. college-age youth right now, it’s safe to say the story of what happened back then would be murky to most.

This June, in brief remarks at a public forum on “democracy,” a former U.S. president unexpectedly referred to “the decision of one man to launch a totally unjustified and brutal invasion of Iraq.” It was a strange venue for this denunciation, since he was speaking at the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas (which houses, among other things, the Freedom Hall, the Defending Freedom Table, and the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum). Odder

still was that the man giving the speech was George W. Bush himself. In 2003, he was the man who launched the brutal and criminal U.S. invasion of Iraq. Seemingly embarrassed, Bush tried to recoup: “I mean – of Ukraine,” he blurted. “Iraq, too. Anyway.” Media pundits filled the airwaves with analyses of the White House ex-denizen’s “Freudian slip.”

George W. Bush is hailed today as a hero of “democracy” by Democratic politicians. Former first lady Michelle Obama gets photographed hugging him, proclaiming Bush to be her “beautiful” friend and “partner in crime.” In fact, like a string of Democratic and Republican presidents before and after him, Bush Jr. is a literal war criminal. Leaked photos of unspeakable sadism at the U.S. military’s Abu Ghraib torture site showed the meaning of his “Operation Iraqi Freedom.” The murderous “Operation Enduring Freedom” he launched in 2001 with the occupation of Afghanistan

– part of U.S. imperialism’s terrorist “War on Terror” – took over a quarter million lives as it continued for two decades under Barack Obama and Donald Trump, up until August 2021 when Biden called it quits as the failed imperialist terror war ended in chaos.<sup>8</sup>

### Incubators, WMDs and “Freedom Fries”

The 2003-11 Iraq War that Bush Jr. launched is also called the second Gulf War. The first Gulf War (1990-91), known as Operation “Desert Slaughter,” was launched by his father and fellow war criminal, George H.W. Bush. It too was prepared and accompanied by an enormous propaganda barrage. In August 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, a former British protectorate and hereditary monarchy designated a strategic partner by the U.S. Soon Bush Sr. was giving speeches saying that Saddam Hussein had Kuwaiti “kids in incubators thrown out,” proving that Saddam was “Hitler revisited.” The U.S. and British press had been blasting out a tale of Iraqi troops yanking premature babies out of incubators, then leaving them to die on the cold floor of a Kuwaiti hospital. There was even a young “witness” called “Nurse Nayirah,” who gave heart-wrenching testimony in front of the TV cameras. The story, spread far and wide by the mass media, “was reminiscent of crude propaganda horror stories about German soldiers in World War I bayoneting Belgian infants (a story fabricated by the British government that later was discredited...).”<sup>9</sup> The incubators tale was eventually discredited too, exposed as a fabrication by the American PR firm Hill & Knowlton.<sup>10</sup> But not before it had done its work of helping “forge a white-hot war-will” for the 1991 invasion and the massive killing of Iraqis that ensued in Operation Desert Slaughter.

George Bush Jr. – who claimed Saddam “tried to kill my dad” – presided over the new brutal U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the mass murder and colo-

<sup>8</sup> See “The Lies Behind Imperialist Crimes: From Pentagon Papers to Afghanistan Papers,” *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020, and “Afghanistan: Humiliating Defeat for Murderous U.S. Imperialism,” *The Internationalist* No. 64, July-September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Eugene Secunda and Terence P. Moran, *Selling War to America: From the Spanish American War to the Global War on Terror* (2007).

<sup>10</sup> “When contemplating war, beware of babies in incubators,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 September 2002.



**Button with Woodrow Wilson’s 1916 presidential campaign slogan. Once reelected, Wilson brought U.S. into imperialist First World War.**

nial occupation that continued for years thereafter. This criminal enterprise wasn’t the work of just “one man”; he did it with more than a little help from his friends. Front and center were his VP Dick Cheney (frequently compared to Darth Vader, he is the father of present-day Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney) and Secretary of State Colin Powell. After contributing to the attempted cover-up of the U.S. Army’s 1968 massacre of more than 500 unarmed civilians at My Lai, Powell ascended in the military brass. During the first Gulf War, he became head of the military high command, which, Army officials boasted, had large numbers of Iraqi troops deliberately buried alive by “combat earth movers” and tanks armed with plow blades (“U.S. Tank-Plows Said to Bury Thousands of Iraqis,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1991).

At CUNY, City College has a School for Civic and Global Leadership named after Colin Powell. In 2003, he was tasked with selling the official *casus belli* for Bush Jr.’s Iraq War. It was all about the “WMDs,” Powell proclaimed – “weapons of mass destruction” that Saddam Hussein’s government supposedly had, but didn’t. Appearing before the United Nations in February ’03, Powell presented supposedly “irrefutable” evidence – featuring a set of aerial photos – that supposedly proved the U.S. accusations.

It was a classic imperialist Big Lie to “shape and train the nation” for war. The capitalist media, both liberal and conservative, enlisted with gusto in selling it. (This is powerfully documented in the 2007 film *War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*.) Against the repeated onslaughts of the U.S. (and its ally Britain) against Iraq, a semicolonial nation originally carved out by a secret WWI agreement between the UK and France (the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916), we revolutionary Marxists called to *defeat U.S. imperialism* and for the world’s workers to defend Iraq, without giving any political support to the bourgeois government of Saddam Hussein.

Bush Jr.’s Iraq War had its equivalent of the WWI campaign that told patriotic Americans to say “liberty cabbage” instead of “sauerkraut.” In March 2003, Congress ordered its cafeterias to change the name of French toast to “freedom toast” and French fries to “freedom fries.” The reason for this ludicrous exercise in culinary chauvinism? France was declining to enlist in the U.S./British “coalition of the willing” that launched the Iraq invasion.

As for the obscene lie that any of the U.S. imperialists’ wars have anything to do with saving children, mothers, or anyone or

**Revolution**



**Soldiers ordered to run toward mushroom cloud from nuclear bomb in U.S. military’s 1957 Desert Rock bomb test/training exercise. (Still from *The Atomic Cafe*.)**

<sup>6</sup> The judge’s decision is online at [casetext.com/case/united-states-v-motion-picture-film-the-spirit-of](http://casetext.com/case/united-states-v-motion-picture-film-the-spirit-of).

<sup>7</sup> Alan Axelrod, *Selling the Great War: The Making of American Propaganda* (2009). Axelrod states that Creel and his committee became “very familiar to such earnest students of propaganda as Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels, both of whom looked to the American government’s World War I ‘information’ program as a model on which to build [Germany’s] propaganda industry.” On CPI techniques’ long-term impact, also see John Maxwell Hamilton, *Manipulating the Masses: Woodrow Wilson and the Birth of American Propaganda* (2020) and Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (2009).



# Beethoven Bans and “Liberty Cabbage”

During World War I, the largest single ethnic group in the U.S. – German Americans – was targeted by the national-chauvinist crusade for “100 percent Americanism.” Many states and localities sought to ban people from speaking the German language in public, while one of the proliferating xenophobic groups, the American Defense Society, called to “make war on the Hun language” in a 1918 pamphlet titled *Throw Out the German Language and All Disloyal Teachers*.

Amidst the patriotic frenzy, sauerkraut was renamed “liberty cabbage” and frankfurters became “hot dogs.” While this absurd culinary jingoism might strike us as funny today, it was part of a campaign whose effects were widespread and sometimes violent. “Loyalty” groups like the American Protective League and Councils of National Defense joined in

fanning a pogrom atmosphere, and people identified as German or “pro-German” were tarred and feathered in 13 states, sometimes resulting in fatalities, while others were forced to kiss the flag and promise to buy more Liberty bonds.

Imperialist war on battlefields overseas brought bellicose escalations on the domestic cultural front. In some U.S. cities, German-language theaters were forced to close. Beethoven was literally banned in one city after another, as his music, together with that of Bach, Schubert and others, was purged from music programs across the country. “German music [is] the most dangerous form of German propaganda,” the American Defense Society proclaimed, “because it appeals to the emotions and has power to sway an audience as nothing else can.” In Omaha, Nebraska, orchestra conductor Otto Scharf was targeted by a patriot-

ic mob, which smeared yellow paint on the hotel where he was staying, and on the hotel’s owner. The cops arrested the conductor and charged him with disturbing the peace.

“In Pittsburgh, the city council issued a city-wide ban on all music by Beethoven. The Metropolitan Opera Company of New York forbade the production of German works; the Philadelphia Orchestra said it would stop performing all German music, beginning November 10, 1917. The superintendent of schools in New Jersey announced that German music would be banned throughout the state. In California, the state board of education ordered that textbook pages containing German songs be cut out.”<sup>1</sup>

Readers today might imagine that those are just pages from a distant past. But take a

<sup>1</sup> Erik Kirschbaum, *Burning Beethoven: The Eradication of German Culture in the United States in World War I* (2015).

look at what’s going on in the year 2022. “Venues across the West are shunning Russian musicians, ballet dancers and films,” announced CBS News (21 April), amidst the reactionary nationalist war provoked by the U.S. and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). In early March, New York’s Metropolitan Opera banned Russian superstar soprano Anna Netrebko. The banning of Netrebko (who was replaced by a Ukrainian singer) likely presaged the end of the Met’s collaboration with Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater. Meanwhile Carnegie Hall hastened to cancel all performances by the Mariinsky Orchestra with world-famous conductor Valery Gergiev and pianist Denis Matsuev. If things like this make you crave some vodka and you head for a nearby liquor store, you’re likely to be told: “All Russian products have been taken off the shelves.” ■

Timothy A. Clary / AFP / Getty



**5 February 2003: Colin Powell, then George W. Bush’s Secretary of State, delivers lying “Weapons of Mass Destruction” speech to U.N. The war propaganda blitz paved the way for U.S. imperialist invasion, colonial occupation and mass murder in Iraq.**

anything except their own profits and drive for world domination, the comments of Madeleine Albright, who died in March of this year, speak louder than a million pious claims. Former Secretary of State and U.S. Ambassador to the UN under Democratic president Bill Clinton, Albright was asked in a *60 Minutes* interview about the 500,000 Iraqi children who died as a result of sanctions imposed on Iraq after the 1991 war. Her reply: “The price is worth it.”<sup>11</sup> Years after the 1991 and 2003 invasions, the mass destruction that the U.S. inflicted on the people of Iraq has continued to fuel a crisis in maternal and child health, together with innumerable other consequences of the death and destruction wrought by the imperialist attack and occupation.<sup>12</sup>

“Your mission is to destroy as many Russian troops as you can,” George W. Bush told a phone prankster claiming to be Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky in May, after noting that as president “I wanted Ukraine into NATO.” Indifferent in reality to the lives of Ukraine’s working people whom they have pushed as cannon fodder into the

nationalist war, they pump out endless stories alleging one unspeakable atrocity after another by “the other side,” while their “responsible” media black out any and all evidence to the contrary, as well as the most basic facts about the historical background and present-day context of the conflict. Meanwhile the U.S. public hears nothing these days about the years-long, well-documented (including previously by mainstream media) terror, torture and killing carried out by Ukraine’s Azov Battalion and other fascist-infested forces, notably in the eight-year onslaught against Russian speakers in Donetsk and Luhansk, which caused 14,000 deaths.<sup>13</sup>

During the Spanish-American War school children were taught a martial ditty titled “Remember the Maine”; in WWI posters were plastered to “Remember Belgium”; in WWII it was “Remember Pearl Harbor” and in Vietnam a fabricated “Tonkin Gulf incident” was the *casus belli* for genocidal U.S. war... In the first Iraq war, people were instructed to “remember” Kuwaiti incubators and in the second to “remember” the “mad brute” Saddam’s non-existent WMDs. The U.S. rulers and their media mouthpieces told the populace to wear yellow ribbons

to “support our troops.” Today, as Biden & Co. send mass shipments of weapons of death to fuel the Ukraine-Russia war, they say everything should be decked in blue and yellow Ukrainian flags. Today it is not the “Hun” that “must be destroyed,” according to the ceaseless deluge of war propaganda, but “mad brute” Russians led by the latest incarnation of “sheer evil,” Russian nationalist president Putin.

Having called for years, and continuing to call, to defend self-rule in the breakaway regions of southern and eastern Ukraine, on the eve of the war the League for the Fourth International issued a statement: “Defeat U.S./NATO War Drive and Sanctions Against Russia!” (23 February). As the conflict quickly became a general war between the Russian capitalist state and that of Ukraine (which has acted as a cat’s paw of Western imperialists), *The Internationalist* added: “We Trotskyists call for revolutionary defeatism on both sides in this reactionary nationalist war, for internationalist proletarian struggle against both capitalist regimes and, above all, against the U.S. and European rulers who set off this conflagration” (“Behind the War: U.S./NATO War Drive Against Russia, China,” 28 February).

Today, there is indeed much to be re-

membered from the long history of U.S. war propaganda and propaganda wars. This includes the reality that we must view with utmost suspicion – and understand the political purpose of – the claims and justifications put out by “our own” U.S. ruling class, which A-bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki; unleashed napalm and carpet-bombing to kill millions in Korea and Vietnam; carried out countless murderous colonial invasions, occupations and proxy wars from the Caribbean to Central America to Africa to the Philippines and beyond, and twice invaded Iraq... Having set off, with its NATO partners, the current Russia-Ukraine conflagration, it is driving toward imperialist war against Russia and China and a thermonuclear World War III. At every step it has prepared and sought to cover its crimes with endless falsifications and deceptions.

“*The truth is revolutionary*” states a long-standing axiom of the Marxist movement. Opposing and exposing the weapons of mass deception and lies continually deployed by U.S. imperialism – this is part of our task as young revolutionaries determined to see capitalism’s masters of war defeated once and for all, by the workers of the world, not least those right here “at home.” ■



**Propaganda poster for Cold War U.S. government film featuring Bert the Turtle, a character invented by the Federal Civil Defense Administration in 1951 to teach children to “duck and cover” under their school desks as part of “preparedness” campaign for nuclear war against USSR.**

<sup>11</sup> See “Madeleine Albright: Death of a Cold War Criminal,” *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022.

<sup>12</sup> “Roots of Iraq’s maternal and child health crisis run deep,” *The Lancet*, 16 March 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See “The Truth About Ukraine’s Fascist Infestation,” *The Internationalist* No. 66, January-April 2022.



# Join the CUNY Internationalist Clubs!

This leaflet by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs is updated from the original version that was published in 2010.

We are the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, the organization of revolutionary Marxist students at the City University of New York. We seek to win students to the struggle to sweep away the wreckage of capitalism and to replace it with a socialist society.

Capitalism is a *system* that produces endless war, poverty and racism. Just look at the world around you.

Today, abortion rights are being destroyed, racist police terror never stops, and neither do mass deportations. U.S. imperialism's rapidly escalating war drive against China and Russia threatens to detonate World War III. Meanwhile, millions fear eviction and destitution. Capitalism's healthcare system couldn't handle the pandemic, and its anarchy of production for profit has led to a deepening climate crisis. Right-wing bigots are emboldened to go after gay, lesbian and trans rights. Amid the chaos and decay of this system, huge numbers of youth are afraid they will have no future.

It's not hard to see that *we need a revolution*. Our job is to help make it happen.

The CUNY Internationalist Clubs go back to the fall of 2001 when we waged a campaign in defense of immigrant students at CUNY. As the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, the CUNY administration, prodded by racist politicians, did its part for the "war effort." It tried to throw thousands of immigrant students out of school by charging them the much higher "out of state" tuition rate. In response, the Internationalist Group initiated protests of hundreds that eventually were able to roll back this "war purge" for many undocumented students.

Students who worked on this campaign went on to form the Hunter Internationalist Club. We were joined by activists at Bronx Community College and other campuses, and began publishing the newspaper *Revolution*.

So what do the CUNY Internationalist Clubs do? Well, first of all, we **educate** ourselves and our fellow students about the struggle of the working class and the oppressed, and the revolutionary theory of Marxism, with forums, study groups, and our newspaper and other publications. Check out what we have to say, and come discuss it with us!

We also **agitate** against all the injustices that are created by the capitalist system: for the *defeat of the U.S. in its bloody imperialist wars* abroad and attacks on immigrants "at home." We fight against the racist oppression of black people; to *abolish the death penalty*; to mobilize workers power to defend black and Latino communities against police brutality.

We fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*; for genuine equality for women, including the right to *free abortion on demand* and for *free, 24-hour childcare*; and against all forms of discrimination against gay, lesbian and trans people.

We fight for free, integrated higher education for all: for *open admissions* with no



May 2 protest in Brooklyn, New York supporting immigrant construction/demolition workers fighting against dangerous working conditions, poverty pay at non-union Super Clean company.

tuition and living stipends so working-class students can afford to study. We don't accept funds (or censorship) from the school administration: we say *abolish the Board of Trustees*. CUNY should be run by democratically elected committees of students, teachers and workers.

And together with the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, we **organize** students to join the struggle to put an end to these injustices by helping to build a *revolutionary workers party*, inspired by the Bolshevik party that led the first successful *workers revolution* in Russia in October of 1917.

Here we need to talk some history. In Russia for the first time ever the workers, supported by the poor peasants and soldiers, smashed the old regime, seized power and formed their own government based on workers councils, or "soviets." The Bolsheviks saw this as the beginning of an international socialist revolution that would bring down capitalist rule, liberate the colonized subjects of imperialism, and open the road to a future communist world free of class oppression. Today we carry on their struggle.

The CUNY Internationalist Clubs stand on the tradition and program of Leon Trotsky, the organizer with Lenin of the October Revolution, leader of the Soviet Red Army and founder of the Fourth International. Despite the usurpation of political power by a conservative, nationalist bureaucracy under Stalin, who betrayed the Revolution and its internationalist program, the Trotskyists unconditionally defended the Soviet Union against counter-revolution from within or without.

When capitalist rule was restored in the USSR and East Europe in 1989-92 it led to devastation for working people, particularly women. Today we likewise defend the bureaucratically deformed workers states of China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam against imperialism and the encroachment of capitalism, while fighting for internationalist workers democracy to oust the Stalinist rulers who are selling out the remaining gains of revolution.

## What Is Capitalism?

Mass poverty side by side with obscene wealth defines our world. The clothes you're wearing were probably made by workers in Haiti or Bangladesh who are literally paid starvation wages, less than \$3 a day, while the bosses make billions by exploiting their labor. But it's more than economics. Capitalism produces all sorts of social oppression.

In 2020, millions took to the streets in protests sparked by the racist police murder of George Floyd. Yet under both Democrats and Republicans, the killing never stops. From the time of slavery and still today, U.S. capitalism has racial oppression written into its DNA. The vast majority of black people in the U.S. are still last-hired and first-fired, live in segregated neighborhoods, and go to underfunded, overcrowded segregated public schools, under a regime of police terror.

Today in the United States, nearly two million people are in prison. Most are African American or Latino, and most are in prison for non-violent drug or property "crimes." Together with the horrific statistics of the racist mass incarceration system goes the death count of police terror. For the first 19 years of this century, the horrifying number of people killed by police averaged 1,400 annually, a figure that rose to over 2,200 civilians killed by cops in 2020.

Every day, hundreds of immigrant workers are snatched by the police and shipped to private prisons and concentration camps on the way to deportation, while the media and politicians compete with immigrant-bashing campaigns. Images of mounted border patrol agents brutalizing Haitian immigrants last year recalled the slave patrols of the antebellum period.

Yet black workers are a strategic part of the U.S. economy, and increasingly immigrant workers are as well. So why are they targeted by the forces of repression? Because the rulers need an "enemy within," to regiment the population for war, and a scapegoat for the economic chaos created by their capitalist system.

Regardless of whether there's a Democrat or a Republican in the White House, they're the partner parties of American capitalism. They both voted to hand over trillions to the Wall Street bankers in 2008 for the economic crisis they created; they're both war parties. And as we stated from the get-go and events have amply shown, Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez et al. are capitalist politicians whose function is to rope youth and workers into the Democratic Party.

What we need is to break with all bourgeois parties and build a revolutionary workers party that fights to overthrow the capitalist system.

## Why Socialism?

Once upon a time, capitalism represented economic progress, in its brutal way. It revolutionized production, swept away the barriers of feudalism, and brought into being an international, millions-strong working class. But those days are long gone, capitalism is decaying. Today technological innovations are accompanied by a decline in living standards. In the U.S. now, the prospects for young people are worse than for our parents: fewer will complete college, on top of which we're saddled with tens of thousands of dollars in student debt, which you can't get rid of even by declaring bankruptcy.

There's got to be a better way, and there is. Workers have the power to take control of the means of production, get rid of the oppressive capitalist state, and organize the economy for the purpose of meeting human needs, not for the private profit of property owners. This is the only solution to capitalism: *workers revolution*.

How do we get there? In recent years, there's been a lot of talk by anarchists and others against parties. Yet history shows that for the working class to take power requires a party to centralize and lead the struggle against a very powerful and centralized enemy. The idea that we can prevail against the Pentagon, the White House and Wall Street with little collectives is simply not serious.

The revolutionary party we need must be one that champions the cause of all those exploited and oppressed by capitalist society, bringing revolutionary class consciousness to the mass of workers in the course of the class struggle. Students and youth can play an important role in this struggle, if we understand what we're fighting for and get organized, allied with the power of the working class. That's what we in the Internationalist Clubs are about.

There are some other groups at CUNY that claim to be "socialist." But they stand for something very different. The best known today is the YDSA, youth group of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America. Built as a fan club for Sanders and AOC, it has nothing to do with the fight for socialist revolution, working instead to funnel students into the imperialist war party of Joe Biden & Co. A number of other groups (Socialist Alternative, Party for Socialism and Liberation, Left Voice) seek to attract young radicals with

*continued on page 23*



The November 2021-January 2022 strike by Columbia University student employees – the fourth strike in five years – highlighted issues of enduring importance for union and student activists. The materials published here appeared previously in the *Class Struggle Education Workers Journal* Marxism & Education No. 6 (January 2022).

It was the longest higher education strike in more than a decade, and one of the largest recent strikes in the United States, carried out by a union representing 3,000 graduate and undergraduate student employees. After union members voted down a tentative agreement that sold short their demands in the spring, the November 2021-January 2022 strike by the Student Workers of Columbia won a contract that was the first ever for the union, and the first anywhere in the U.S. to win recognition of union representation for all undergrad teaching and course assistants, together with grad student workers.

On January 7, after almost ten weeks on strike – their fourth in five years – Columbia University’s student employees scored this important step forward against one of the most notorious employers in the “academic labor industry.” The Student Workers of Columbia (SWC) held out on the picket lines and escalated the struggle at a decisive moment in the fight for a contract, full recognition of their union, significant improvements in pay, health and child care, measures against discrimination and harassment, and other demands.

This meant defying high-and-mighty Columbia U.’s drive to grind them down and mete out a new defeat that would teach defiant employees a lesson. Rather than cave to the bosses’ threats, the strikers collectively decided each week

to continue the struggle. Against the threat to replace strikers, their 8 December 2021 “Shut It Down” action was a turning point. After an earlier “last, final offer,” on Christmas Eve Columbia said it would give further ground on key demands, *if* the union agreed to accept the exclusion from the bargaining unit of hourly employees with less than 15 hours/week of work, a relatively small part of the workforce.

Instead, strikers decided to stand fast, voting to “go all in on recognition” of all the union’s members, indignantly refusing Columbia’s demand that they throw their most vulnerable sector under the bus. The result was a union contract, approved by the membership on January 28, with across-the-board raises (including for minimum hourly pay, which rises from \$15 to \$21 in January and eventually \$22.50), 75% dental coverage, gains on health and childcare coverage, changes on discrimination and harassment policy, and other demands. “Full unit recognition” was achieved. There was discussion of the ab-

sence of an “agency shop,” but rather than such measures that institutionalize union/management collaboration, what’s needed is class-struggle unionism.<sup>1</sup>

“Struggle Educates”: this slogan (*La lucha educa*) from striking teachers in Mexico and Puerto Rico is one of our favorites in Class Struggle Education Workers. As detailed in the following article (and the March 2021 leaflet from the previous strike, see page 17), that is very much the case with current struggles by higher-ed educators. This strike followed the ones at New York University and Harvard. While these are high-end private universities, the implications and repercussions of what happened at Columbia are being discussed from the City University of New York to the University of Illinois to the University of California, where grad student workers carried out the “COLA strike” for a cost-of-living

<sup>1</sup> See “Life After Janus: Bust the Union-Busters with Hard Class Struggle,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018.

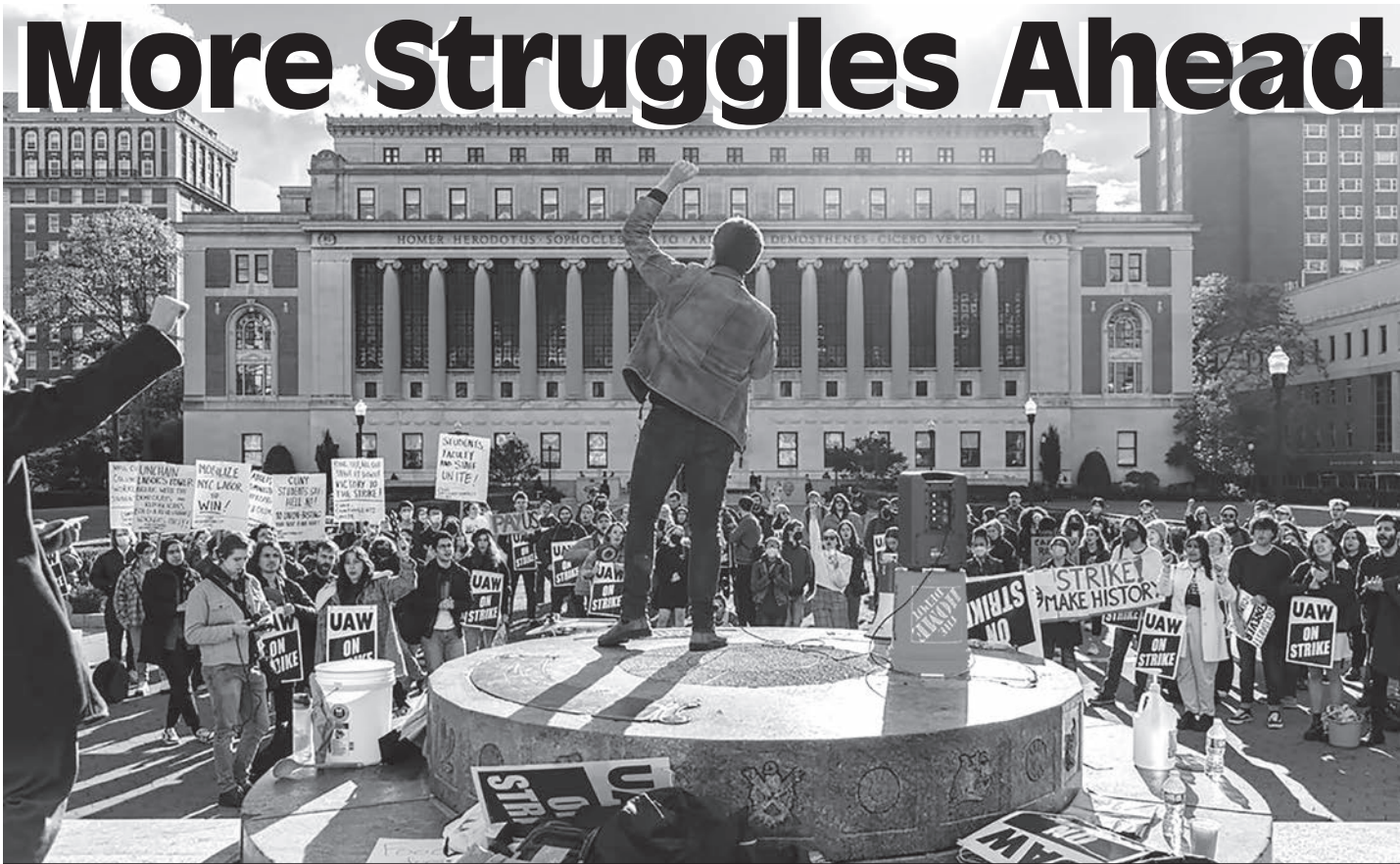
tem down the line.

The win at Columbia signals more battles in higher ed between hardline administrations and low-paid teachers. Despite lofty pretensions, in the groves of academe cash is king and poverty wages are the reality for most educators. This is the business model for both public and private U’s. To demolish the two-tier academic labor system and win free higher education for all will take an all-out revolt in which students, teachers and workers break out of the confines of the ivory tower, unite their struggles and forge real links with key sectors of the workers and oppressed.

Class Struggle Education Workers calls for the *expropriation of private universities* and for *student-teacher-worker control of both these and the public ones*. As we have stressed, this is a political fight, requiring a break with the Democrats and all capitalist parties, to build a class-struggle workers party fighting for a workers government. ■

<sup>2</sup> See “A Militant Program to Win UC Grad Student Workers Strike,” on [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org), March 2020.

# Columbia Strike Wins, More Struggles Ahead



## *La lucha educa*: Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross

On the first day of the Columbia University student workers strike, 3 November 2021.

## Against Bosses' Threats and Maneuvers – Solidarity from CUNY Victory to the Columbia Student Workers Strike!

28 DECEMBER 2021 – As we go to press, the strike of Student Workers of Columbia (part of United Auto Workers Local 2110), now in its ninth week, is at a critical juncture. It is the fourth strike in five years, as the union is still fighting to win a first-ever contract. Representing more than 3,000 Columbia University graduate and undergraduate academic employees (including instructors, teaching assistants, graders, researchers and others), the SWC’s demands include a *living wage* (many student workers who are paid hourly earn as little as \$16 an hour, while those on an annual appointment currently

make as little as \$26,000 a year), *better health care* and *measures against discrimination and harassment*.

On December 23, the university presented its “best and final” contract proposal. The SWC noted that Columbia gave some ground on pay, healthcare and other issues. (Certainly, the university can’t plead poverty – its endowment grew more than 32% in fiscal 2021, to \$14.35 billion.) Yet a central sticking point remains: the bosses’ insistence on excluding from the bargaining unit those who have less than 15 hours’ work per week or haven’t yet racked up 250 hours. The purpose is to further divide the workforce and incentiv-

ize reliance on grossly underpaid “casual” labor. Calling an online “Rally for Recognition” on December 30, an SWC spokesperson stated, “By creating a category of ‘casual’ workers who are excluded from the union, the administration will be able, over time, to replace union jobs with ‘casual,’ non-union jobs.”

Union activists rightly emphasize the need to oppose this union-busting scheme. The issue of full union recognition has been a central reason for the current strike from the beginning. Last May, in the previous strike, union members rejected, by a vote of 1,093 to 970, a deal with the university negotiated by the bargain-

ing committee then in office. This was in large part because the proposed settlement would have “excluded hundreds of workers who have gone on strike and organized for this union,” as Joanna Lee, one of the three committee members who opposed it, tweeted at the time. (The *Columbia Spectator* [2 May 2021] reported that “a graduate student union has never before rejected a tentative agreement.”)

To explicitly reflect its inclusion of undergraduate employees, the union changed its name from Graduate Workers of Columbia to Student Workers of Columbia. A new bargaining committee was elected in July, and in September the membership voted

pay escalator in March 2020.<sup>2</sup>

It was on the picket line that the gains won in the Columbia student workers strike were made, not through photo ops and speeches by Democratic “electeds,” including those from the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America. The fight to put “Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross” into practice played a key role, as will continue to be the case in “educating the educators” in struggles around the country. It is a basic union principle – one regularly violated by labor officialdom in their class collaboration with the bosses – but one that’s just a first step toward class-struggle unionism. That focuses on a programmatic struggle for a leadership prepared to take on the capitalist sys-





**Class Struggle Education Workers, CUNY Internationalists participated actively in Columbia strikes launched in spring and fall 2021 (above).**

to authorize a new strike, which began on 3 November 2021. In this strike, as in the spring and in earlier strikes, activists from the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Class Struggle Education Workers have participated intensively on the picket lines and in helping build support. In an important step, SWC members began seeking to stop deliveries to the struck campus, starting in the predawn hours, and our comrades have participated in these efforts, which have sometimes met with success.

Throughout, we have emphasized that it's essential to put into practice the principle that "Picket lines mean don't cross." To win a solid victory at Columbia, a pillar of New York's capitalist elite, it's key that all classes be cancelled and all sectors of the campus workforce brought out. (See the leaflet of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, "Solidarity from CUNY – All Out to Win: Victory to the Columbia Grad Workers Strike!" March 2021.) This means "One out, all out," instead of the labor tops' policy of keeping the rest of the workforce (including other units of UAW Local 2110) on the job.

As higher-education labor struggles continue to break out across the country, whatever happens at Columbia will be cited as a precedent. A solid victory here won't be won with business-as-usual unionism. It would need to go well beyond Columbia's academic "ivory tower" to bring in the power of NYC labor together with oppressed communities. In particular, black Harlem, just below Morningside Heights, has been forever lorded over by Columbia, whose flagrant racism sparked the historic strike of 1968.

### The Struggle Escalates

On 2 December 2021, Columbia threatened to fire strikers (which would mean opening the way to their replacement by scabs) if they did not return to work by the 10th, a couple of days before final exams were due to begin. For the strikers, weeks of "one day longer" on the picket lines were stretching toward the end of the semester, bills were piling up, could they hold out? Columbia's arrogant bosses thought they could finally break them.

Instead, strikers redoubled their determination, upping the ante. The elements of what's needed to win were coming more sharply into focus for many – in particular, that picket lines really do mean don't cross. A day of action was called and hundreds of union fliers were posted up calling to "SHUT IT DOWN" on Wednesday, December 8. (See graphic.) The *Columbia Spectator* (9 December 2021) reported:

"On Wednesday, the Student Workers

of Columbia-United Auto Workers held multiple picket lines blocking all entrances to Columbia's Morningside campus from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., asking students and faculty not to cross the picket lines in an effort to entirely shut down the campus. The student-workers were joined by faculty members, undergraduates, and members of other unions and labor organizations across New York City."

Strikers and supporters linked hands, circling both sides of huge campus gates, holding official "On Strike" signs, and often large handmade ones. Early in the day at Columbia's main entrance on Broadway and 116th Street, a prominent strike organizer, an Asian woman, was viciously shoved by a man who ostentatiously ripped up the large sign she was carrying, which read "ON STRIKE! SHUT IT DOWN! PICKET LINES MEAN DON'T CROSS!" Later at the same gate, an NYPD "Community Affairs" officer lunged suddenly and shoved picketers.

At a different entrance a scab violently barged into a young woman picketer from the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, who was knocked over backwards and would have hit the sidewalk had another picketer not caught her. Anti-strike aggressions multiplied as the day went on – but the Columbia administration, following the union-busters' playbook, lyingly accused the *strikers* of "violence."

On December 8, the situation varied from one place and time to another, and so did consciousness. It was notable that, repeatedly, where scabs violently busted through the picket lines, determined strike militants doubled down, seeking to uphold and defend the vital labor principle that picket lines mean don't cross. But at some entrances pickets were porous, which un-

## SHUT IT DOWN!

COLUMBIA HAS THREATENED TO PERMANENTLY REPLACE STUDENT WORKERS.

WEDS 12/8



8AM - 6 PM

**JOIN THE PICKET LINE  
DO NOT ENTER CAMPUS  
DO NOT GO TO CLASSES  
DO NOT HOLD CLASSES**

**Picket line means  
DON'T CROSS!**

**SWC leaflet for day of action to shut down Columbia.**



**8 December 2021 Columbia strike day of action drew participation from other NYC unions. Teamsters Local 804 brought its inflatable fat cat.**

dermines strikes. The uneven consciousness reflects decades of union bureaucrats calling "informational" picket lines – a contradiction in terms which teaches people that it's supposedly "OK" to cross picket lines. But as hundreds of Columbia strikers linked hands in large pickets, blocking entrances and chanting "Picket lines mean don't cross," many may have begun to see, for the first time, that once a strike has been collectively decided on, *everyone* must respect the lines. Generalizing and putting this into practice is crucial for the future of this and other struggles.

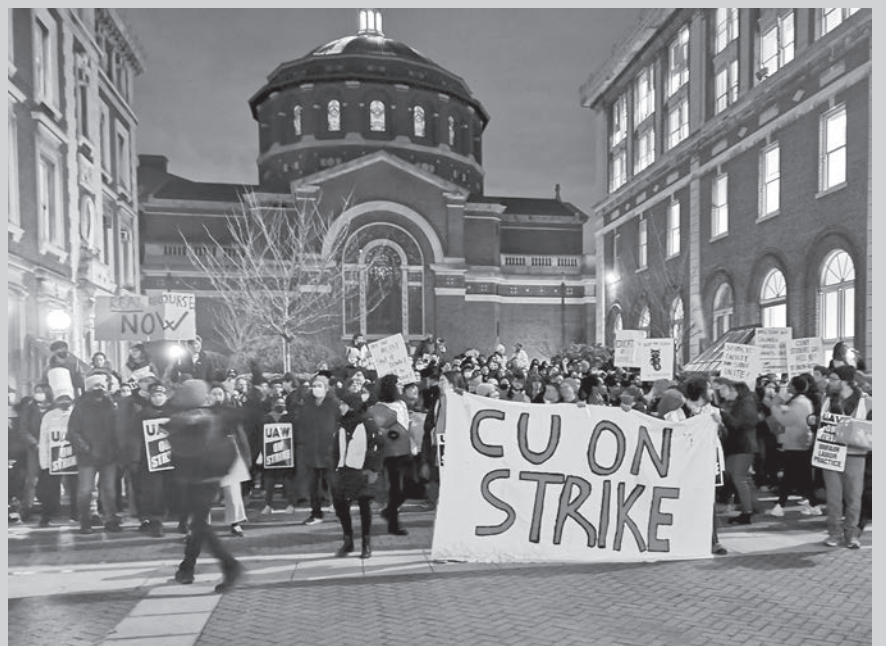
Outreach to a number of NYC labor sectors brought a lively contingent of Verizon workers from CWA Local 1101; officers and members of the CUNY faculty/staff union (PSC); some activists from DC37, unionized Legal Aid and legal services employees, and others. Most prominent was a truck from Teamsters Local 804, which represents UPS workers, bearing a huge inflatable "fat cat." (This recalls how adjunct faculty at Sussex County Community College in New Jersey won

their contract fight in a day back in 2009, when unionized truck drivers blocked all the entrances.) The Central Labor Council sent out an announcement of the SWC's day of action. This was important, of course – though if the CLC were to actually mobilize to the picket lines even one or two thousand out of the 1.3 million workers it boasts of representing, it would be a whole different ballgame.

As in any strike, it's about power. The strikers' December 8 day of action to "Shut It Down" was a big step up in militancy, and certainly a crucial factor in getting the administration to move on some of the union's key demands. With the new year around the corner, the strikers are sticking to their guns. They deserve and need the massive, militant solidarity that can help push this struggle over the finish line, forcing Columbia's high-handed bosses to give in. A victory for the Columbia strikers would be a boost and an inspiration to workers and students everywhere, as we face the big challenges and opportunities ahead. ■

### An Internationalist Video

## Columbia Student Workers On Strike



On the evening of 8 December 2021 day of action, hundreds of strikers and supporters gathered outside class being given by Columbia University president Lee Bollinger. Fighting for dental insurance, and to show they meant business, strikers chanted, "We have teeth." See Internationalist video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-DVQ5HISwU>.



***Solidarity from CUNY – All Out to Win***

# **Victory to the Columbia Grad Workers Strike!**

*The following 16 March 2021 leaflet by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth was distributed at the strike lines at Columbia University.*

Spirits were high on the 200+-strong picket line as Columbia University research and teaching assistants launched their strike on Monday, March 15. Defying the haughty barons lording it over this fiefdom of academic privilege – which has the nerve to claim poverty as it sits on a \$11.26 *billion* endowment – the strikers chanted “What’s disgusting? Union-busting!”

Organized in the Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC), which for two years has been bargaining for its first contract and is part of UAW Local 2110, the strikers denounce “starvation wages,” the university’s resistance to improvements in health coverage as well as its provocative refusal to accept a “union shop” or even measures the union holds essential to protecting its members against discrimination and harassment.

Coming amidst the inspiring organizing drive of largely African American Amazon workers in Alabama, an important nurses’ strike in Massachusetts that began on International Women’s Day, the fight against the Liox/Wash Supply company’s union-busting firing of immigrant women laundry workers here in NYC – and soon after the major Teamsters strike at Hunts Point market in the Bronx – the Columbia strike may be part of the beginnings of a new upsurge of labor struggle.

For us at the City University of New York, solidarity with the GWC strike is connected to our fight against adjunct poverty, the two-tier labor system, course cuts and the conditions that make just getting an education harder than ever for CUNY’s students, whose families are largely workers deemed “essential but disposable” amidst the crises of this decaying capitalist system. We need a CUNY-wide strike. As this would go up against New York State’s vicious Taylor Law – which “prohibits” strikes by public employees and has been administered by Democrats and Republicans alike – solidarity would be crucial to a CUNY strike. The stakes are big, and as clarity is crucial, we will address the issues frankly.

For GWC strikers, uniting with CUNY is also part of breaking free from the confines of Columbia’s overwhelmingly white ivory tower, smack in the middle of Harlem. This is essential for uniting with the workers and oppressed who have the power to bring to their knees the racist plutocrats who are trying to break your union. Recall that Columbia’s flagrant racism towards the Harlem community, and its links to U.S. imperialism’s genocidal war against Vietnam, touched off the huge student strike of 1968.

**September 2022**

The same NYPD that carried out a bloody police riot against the 1968 strike is notorious for cop terror against black people today. Meanwhile the Columbia administration’s arrogance is unabated, as it tells GWC strikers they don’t “deserve” protection against discrimination and preaches “mutual realism” (*sic!*) to student workers struggling to pay their rent in the midst of a pandemic.

To defeat the anti-union administration and its ruling-class godfathers, however, it is not enough to be right and have justice on your side – it’s a question of power. On strike means shut it down. All classes should be stopped, now, and students brought out *en masse* to the pickets and rallies. Moreover, as shown in one strike after another by grad students, TAs, adjuncts and others across the country and here in New York, including by UAW 2110 (see item at the end of this article): for university strikes to win, all sectors of the campus workforce need to unite in genuine solidarity – *one out, all out. Picket lines mean don’t cross!*

At the March 15 rally marking the first day of the GWC strike, the president of the NYC Central Labor Council gave a speech vowing that the city’s labor movement is behind the strikers 100%. But words are not enough – if the city’s major unions built mass pickets to shut Columbia down, the strike could be won in a day. We need to fight for this to happen. But why *doesn’t* the labor leadership put real muscle behind the words of solidarity, even in struggles much bigger than this? First and foremost because it subordinates the unions to the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism, which together with the Republicans has administered the capitalist system for more than a century and a half.

This too was on display at the strike launch rally. It’s not unusual for labor leaders to put a couple of “friend-of-labor” Democratic pols up on the platform – but the March 15 rally may have set a new record, as a seemingly endless assemblage of candidates for mayor and city council used it as a photo op and to test out their stump speeches on a captive audience. Reliance on capitalist politicians – instead of the militant mass mobilization of *workers power* – has brought defeat to all too many strikes and labor struggles.

Of course, capitalist politicians don’t like it when workers go against the bosses’ rules – even less so when their own party is in the White House, as is the case with Joe “Mass Incarceration” Biden today. That’s why they have their Taylor and Taft-Hartley laws, their NLRB regulations, their racist cops, courts, prisons and all the rest of it. As revolutionary Marxists, we call to break from the Democrats and all capitalist parties and politicians, and to build a class-struggle workers party to fight for a workers gov-

ernment. Then, like the rest of the wealth coined from the labor of the workers and oppressed, Columbia U. will be expropriated and put at the service of the needs of all, as part of a socialist revolution here and around the world.

***Solidarity from CUNY to the GWC – All out to win – Victory to the strike!***

## **On Strike Means Shut It Down: Some Lessons of UAW Local 2110’s 2005-06 Strike at NYU**

Today [March 2021], as the Columbia graduate workers union (GWC) is carrying out its strike, the New York University graduate employees union (GSOC) says it too may go on strike soon, if the NYU bosses – whose arrogance rivals that of Columbia’s – keep stonewalling. Like the GWC at Columbia, GSOC at NYU is part of United Auto Workers Local 2110.

Since our inception in the campaign to stop the City University of New York’s “anti-immigrant war purge” in 2001, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs have helped bring out solidarity from students and adjuncts with struggles by sectors of city labor, notably immigrant restaurant, warehouse and laundry workers such as those the Liox/Wash Supply company fired this February for organizing a union. This has also included supporting organizing drives and strikes at a range of different universities. We believe some of these struggles have important lessons for today. Among them is the important grad student strike that UAW 2110/GSOC led at NYU from November 2005 through May 2006. Today at Columbia, strikers chant, “What do we want? A contract! When do we want it? Now! If we don’t get it, **SHUT IT DOWN!**” Key, then and now, is to put that into practice.

The 2005-06 NYU grad students’ strike was launched with enthusiasm and determination. Yet, backed by the National Labor Relations Board’s viciously anti-labor Brown ruling, the hardline NYU administration let GSOC’s contract expire, refused to negotiate a new one – and wound up dealing the strikers a bitter defeat. Nine years went by before GSOC-UAW finally succeeded in negotiating a new contract. In 2016, the Brown decision was reversed; while this can lessen some legal obstacles to organizing, it remains crucial for labor to rely on its own power. Since the ruling class can go quite a while without college papers being graded (whereas a transport strike, for example, can shut things down tight in a day), bringing in active support from other sectors – and large numbers of students – is doubly important.

Key issues in the November 2005 UAW 2110 strike at NYU were addressed by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs in a leaflet issued at that time, advocating that CUNY join NYU on strike. Many of the

issues posed then have continued to come up, again and again, in struggles by grad students, adjuncts and others across the country – and are posed today in the fight to *win* the current GWC-UAW strike at Columbia. Below is an excerpt from our November 2005 leaflet “NYU & CUNY: Strike to Win.”

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“The potential to win is shown by the willingness of many unionized truck drivers to stop deliveries rather than cross the picket lines. New York is a union town, and labor could mobilize thousands to shut the campus down in an instant. Yet the labor tops have limited themselves to the ritual [speechifying and grandstanding].

“[The university’s] employees are divided into various separate unions whose leaders negotiate separate expiration dates and have kept operations going during this strike. Maintenance, supply, elevator repair, garbage disposal and all the other plant work goes on. AFT Local 3882, representing clerical workers, just signed a contract, with a clause against sympathy strikes. Most absurd and self-defeating is the existence of a *separate* union for NYU adjuncts, UAW Local 7902, which operates out of the same office as striking UAW 2110 – but continues to work during the strike!

“During the 2003 Yale University strike, clerical and other workers mobilized *en masse*, shut down streets, paralyzed crucial work, and beat back a haughty, aggressive administration. Members of the Yale workers’ union have repeatedly come to the NYU picket lines to show their support. In contrast, the recent (2004 and 2005) Columbia University graduate assistant strikes were lost: UAW 2110 struck but the union tops had clerical and other workers, often members of the same union, continue to work. [*This is the case in today’s strike as well.*]

“The concept of dividing the workforce into separate unions (craft unionism) was overcome in auto, steel, transport and other strategic industries in the 1930s’ battles to build ‘industrial unions.’ On college campuses seven decades later, splitting workers up this way just plays into the administration’s divide-and-conquer strategy.

“Fighting to win the current NYU strike would help open the way to unite everyone into a single union of all university employees. This should include the professors, who don’t have their own NYU union and in most cases continue to teach; it clearly must not include administrators, campus cops and other enforcers for the employer.”

*The whole leaflet is available online at [internationalist.org/nyucunystrike-towin0511.html](http://internationalist.org/nyucunystrike-towin0511.html).*



# “Why RIY?” Our Path to Revolutionary Marxist Politics

Revolution is glad to present the following materials by comrades Talia, Ivy and Luna describing some of the experiences and motives that led them to join the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.

## Talia

Growing up I was constantly wondering why the world seemed so unfair. I wondered why people spent so much time doing things they didn't want to do and had so little time to do the things that made them happy. I wondered why my mom didn't get a summer vacation, and why – in Philadelphia, where we lived – some people slept on the street. As I got older, I heard the stories of Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice and so many others, and I wondered why black people were constantly being murdered with impunity. I learned about vast inequalities in education, inaccessible reproductive healthcare, and the climate crisis. By the time I was in middle school I realized that the world was in dire need of change. I declared myself a feminist, and later a Bernie Sanders supporter.

In these liberal student circles, everyone agreed that things needed to change, but nobody ever had an explanation as to *why* these things occurred, and their answers as to *how* we should fix them were flimsy. I was never really convinced that things like voting for Democrats and writing letters to state representatives made any impact, as I never saw any results. Black people continued to be gunned down by police, people still slept on the street, and climate crises continued to spiral. As a high-school student in Philly, I wanted to do something against ways in which racism is manifested in the school system. I went to public school, but it was a “magnet” school with selective admissions. Even though it was in a district where 52% of the students are black, and most schools are severely underfunded, my school – which boasted of its exceptionalism – had ample resources but only about a 10% black student population. There was a long history of efforts by students and a number of teachers to address the racism bred by the system, but no real change occurred.

The issue of black liberation also connected up for me with what I began learning about the oppression of the Palestinian people. In Palestine solidarity groups, I heard some activists call for revolution and met people more radical and dedicated than the feminists and Bernie fanatics I had identified with previously. They denounced U.S. imperialism and pointed out the collaboration between the U.S. and Israel. When some demanded that the U.S. stop doing this, I struggled to see why the government would stop just because people asked it to, since alliance with Israel is a strategic move tied up with U.S. domination of the whole region. The U.S. imperialists have no interest in peace or liberation for Palestinians. I know now that we need to take workers action internationally in defense of the Palestinians, and to smash

imperialism through workers revolution; this goes together with the struggle for an Arab-Hebrew Palestinian workers state as part of a region-wide socialist federation of the Near East. While at that time I knew that all struggles to end oppression are connected, including those for black and Palestinian liberation, I still did not see a clear path forward to liberation.

It was by doing an online search for “revolutionary internationalism” that I first came in contact with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth. In talking with RIY I got answers as to both *why* the issues I cared about occurred, and *how* we can go about fixing them. For example, I learned that racism is not the result of white people inherently being racist, as if it's some part of nature that takes on “a life of its own,” but a product of material conditions, with racial oppression woven into capitalism's history and present. This is behind the racist ideology that helps keep the working class divided. Structural racism comes from the need for capitalism to keep black people at the bottom of society in order to most effectively make profits from exploitation. Black liberation is therefore not a matter of white people renouncing their “privilege,” or being told to give things up and live worse (which is actually what racists claim). Instead, it means doing away with the *special oppression* that denies black people rights supposedly common to all, and pushes black people into conditions of extreme oppression even beyond the “normal” exploitation of the working class. It is a matter of extinguishing the rule of the capitalist state, which uses “race” to normalize and justify the material disparities that many liberals and reformists call a matter of privilege.

The liberal idea that more representation (black capitalist politicians) and acknowledgment of “privilege” are the ways to combat racism is an illusion. Racism still exists because massive material inequality still exists. While we fight racism in all its manifestations every day, we explain that for it to wither away, those material inequalities have to be uprooted. And we can only rid our society of them through socialist revolution.<sup>1</sup>

While gaining this clarity was refreshing, the task of overthrowing capitalism through a socialist revolution remained daunting. Although I wanted more than anything to have a role in the overthrow of capitalism and could not bear to sit and watch Gaza be relentlessly bombed, black people be shot dead in the streets by police, and homelessness pervade, I still felt ill-equipped to take action. Together with further study, participating in activities helped deepen my understanding – for example, participating with Internationalist comrades on May Day in New York as well as last year's rally and march that linked the history of International

<sup>1</sup> Among the many Internationalist publications on black liberation through socialist revolution, see “The Racist Police Murder of George Floyd: Only Revolution can Bring Justice,” *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020. (This and subsequent notes have been added by *Revolution*.)



At April 2021 Philadelphia protest demanding freedom for former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Women's Day to the campaign in support of immigrant women laundry workers.<sup>2</sup> Together with my friend Ivy (see below), I brought a group of fellow high-school students to march with the Internationalist contingent in a Philadelphia protest held in April 2021 to demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal.<sup>3</sup>

These are some of the things that led me to join RIY, knowing that Rosa Luxemburg's proposition of “socialism or barbarism” is painfully true. Carrying out a socialist revolution – that is, working effectively towards this goal – is certainly not something anyone is born knowing how to do. That is why the RIY is a training ground for young revolutionaries. It is within the RIY that youth can learn how to help resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and how to help build a vanguard party to lead the workers and oppressed in socialist revolution.

## Ivy

For a long time, I accepted my parents' reactionary views as fact. They would discuss the “evils” of increased government social spending and rising taxes over dinner as Fox News played in the background, and I would regurgitate everything they said to my friends at school. It wasn't until middle school that I began to hear ideas that were in stark contrast to what my parents believed and what I thought I believed. These discussions were juvenile and rudimentary, but they forced me to grapple with conflicting viewpoints and to

<sup>2</sup> See “Wash Supply Worker: ‘We Face Mistreatment and Discrimination,’” *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal is the foremost class-war prisoner in the U.S. He has been imprisoned for over 40 years in three dungeons of the Pennsylvania penitentiary system, almost half that time on death row, an innocent black man framed up by the police. For background on Mumia's case, see “Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Now!” in *Revolution* No. 9, November 2011 and “Free Mumia Abu-Jamal and All Black Panther and MOVE Prisoners!” *The Internationalist* No. 46, January-February 2017.

conclude that I didn't agree with my parents at all. Naturally, at first I figured that had to mean I was a Democrat, because, in the United States, to not be a Republican automatically means (supposedly) that you're a Democrat, and I knew of no other alternatives. I spent most of high school participating in various political activities that I believed at the time would amount to real change—I went to gun control rallies, looked up to “#girlbosses” like Ruth Bader Ginsburg (“RBG”) and Hillary Clinton, declared myself a feminist and lamented over not reaching voting age in time for the 2016 and 2020 elections.

The 2016 presidential election is what introduced me to what I thought was socialism – through the campaign of Bernie Sanders. He called himself a “democratic socialist” and preached the need for a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” I felt like he was giving voice to all the frustration I was feeling towards capitalist society. I knew that fundamentally something needed to change, but the various liberal “movements” I was already participating in at the time weren't providing a path for that. Unbeknownst to me, in backing Sanders I was just being sucked into yet another liberal “movement.” Its purpose was to pull people into the Democratic Party.

I didn't get introduced to Marxism until high school. Until that point, I didn't know that socialism had anything to do with Marx. A friend of mine in high school invited me to join a “socialist book club.” In reality, it didn't do much reading and was a lot more oriented to anarchism than to socialism. It was only once Talia (see above) got in touch with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, and they suggested that anarchist and Marxist readings be compared, that the book club discussed some texts. So we read some material by Mikhail Bakunin (one of the founders of anarchism) and classics like the *Communist Manifesto* and “America Under the Workers' Rule” by James P. Cannon. We also read a few

*continued on page 22*



# NATO “Socialist” War Squad

Talking with students arriving on campuses for the fall 2022 semester, Internationalist youth activists have been struck by how many say they’ve long been “over” the self-styled Squad of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) members and other Democratic Party “progressives” in the U.S. Congress. Some are surprised to find out that when the Squad was elected, almost all groups describing themselves as Marxist enthused over this, as some kind of “victory.” Against such illusions and those that spread them, we told the truth from the beginning, in articles like “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party,” “What ‘Social-Imperialism’ Looks Like,” and “Bernie Sanders and AOC Peddle Biden’s Bitter Brew.”<sup>1</sup>

Even before winning her seat in Congress, DSA superstar Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez went out of her way to show fealty to U.S. imperialism. When Republican senator John McCain died in August 2018, AOC – having won the primary to be Democratic candidate for New York’s 14th Congressional district – chimed in on the chorus of praise for this war criminal, warmonger and racist, tweeting: “John McCain’s legacy represents an unparalleled example of human decency and American service.” As *The Internationalist* stated:

“This homage is a grotesque pledge of allegiance to U.S. imperialism, honoring a man responsible for bombing civilians as a Navy pilot in North Vietnam, who incessantly beat the war drums over the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, who stood shoulder to shoulder with jihadist cutthroats in Libya and Syria and neo-Nazis in Ukraine.”<sup>2</sup>

On their first day in Congress (3 January 2019), AOC and Rashida Tlaib (D-Michigan, at that time the one other DSA member in Congress) voted for the bill maintaining funding for the Department of Homeland Security. On the same day, together with a raft of “progressive” Democrats, they voted for a bill that included some \$20 million “for programs to promote democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela,” that is, preparing the way for a coup by financing the pro-imperialist opposition. In July 2021, when Democrats and Republicans raved against Cuba (whose 1959 Revolution was a major blow to Uncle Sam in his “own backyard”) and in support of anti-communist protests “Made in U.S.A.,” Bernie Sanders and AOC joined in to “solidarize” with them too.<sup>3</sup>

In the 2020 elections, two additional DSA members were elected to Congress: Jamaal Bowman (D-NYC) and Cori Bush (D-Missouri). Others were elected to state and municipal offices in various locales. DSA’s national director, Maria



Lockheed Martin

**AOC and “The Squad” voted for U.S. imperialism to send massive weaponry, like this High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), to fascist-infested Ukraine military in the U.S./NATO-instigated war.**

Svart, said this was because the organization’s “ideas speak to deep human needs” (*In These Times*, 11 January 2021). In reality, its actions speak to the needs of U.S. imperialism, as promptly shown by innumerable other examples. One such action briefly made a few waves inside the group: Bowman’s September 2021 vote for \$1.1 billion in funding to Israel’s “Iron Dome” missile system, which followed his July 2021 vote for \$3.3 billion in military aid to Israel (two months after it rained death and destruction yet again on Palestinians in Gaza).

Some “leftist” elements proposed that the Congressman be expelled from the DSA. But the waves amounted to a minor tempest in its teapot, as onward-and-upward boosterism of the DSA’s electoral “successes” went full steam ahead and it basked in the glow of “unity” with President Joe Biden, House speaker Nancy Pelosi, et al. Bowman was of course not expelled. (“No, DSA Shouldn’t Expel Rep. Jamaal Bowman,” proclaimed Hadas Thier, formerly a leading voice of the now-defunct International Socialist Organization, in *Jacobin* [25 November 2021].) And in December 2021 he traveled to Israel, where he met with Neftali Bennett, then the Zionist state’s butcher-in-chief/prime minister. After all, what’s the point of being a Democratic Congressman if you don’t get to have photo ops with heads of state? Plus which, “DSA electeds” are the No. 1 calling card of the Democratic (Party) “socialists.” To do the work of funneling people into U.S. imperialism’s Democratic Party you have to toe its line, loyally following those who call the shots (literally): the imperialist rulers, from the White House and Pentagon to the halls of Congress on down.

Multiple further examples could be given. And now the billions of dollars for weapons of death have become an ever more massive torrent as the Biden administration pumps vast amounts into backing Ukraine’s military in the current nationalist war with Russia touched off by the U.S./NATO imperialists. (NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.) Just in terms of official U.S. figures on military aid, on August 19 the Department of State declared that U.S. “security assistance” to Ukraine has “totaled approximately \$10.6 billion since the beginning of this Administration.” Many billions more go under

other headings. And in late August the White House “announced a new \$3 billion package ... that will directly fund contracts with the U.S. defense industry for artillery rounds, mortar rounds,” missiles, drones, etc., notes *Politico* (24 August), stating that this marks a shift “from pulling existing weapons off of shelves to awarding contracts to defense firms for weapons that need to be built.”

And the “DSA electeds”? AOC tweeted in February that “any military action must take place with Congressional approval.” Then in May, the DSAers in Congress were among the 368 House of Representatives members voting to approve Biden’s \$40 billion package of aid to the Ukrainian regime. What did this buy? “The package includes almost \$15 billion for defense operations and maintenance which includes \$6 billion for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative and \$8.7 billion to replenish stocks of U.S. equipment sent to Ukraine,” stated Reuters (19 May), adding that the legislation includes “hundreds of millions of dollars for the procurement of missiles, weapons and tracked combat vehicles, ammunition and aircraft, among others.”

Of course, all this is a bonanza for “masters of war” U.S. arms firms – just for example, the Army just awarded Raytheon Missiles & Defense a \$182 million contract to send missiles to Ukraine, reports *The Defense Post* (29 August). The same defense industry trade publication notes (1 June): “US Sending Himars Multiple Rocket System to Ukraine Military: Official,” adding “The new weaponry will come from a recently approved fund of \$40 billion.” The High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) is produced by

Lockheed Martin, whose website today trumpets its role in the “Vietnam War [which] underscored the urgency of developing the capability of moving U.S. troops and weapons quickly overseas,” boasting as well of its production of B-57s, F-111s, “Huey” helicopters, etc. in that genocidal U.S. war as well as other imperialist invasions, occupations, etc.

As Ukrainian officials and media proclaim, U.S.-supplied HIMARS rockets are already in use by Ukraine’s military. What for? Among other things, to strike at civilian targets in Donetsk, such as a funeral march and, around June 20, a civilian apartment building in Kuibishevsky Region. On or shortly before July 4, Ukrainian forces fired HIMARS at civilians in the town of Snezhnoye. On July 10, HIMARS killed three Russian civilians on a humanitarian mission and injured 40 in the Amvrosievsky district. On July 17, HIMARS killed two civilians in Alchevsk... Ukraine is also using HIMARS in shelling near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant – risking setting off a nuclear catastrophe. Thanks, AOC & Co.! Actually, every member of the DSA and its youth group (YDSA), having joined in building up the NATO “socialist” war Squad, has their own share of responsibility in all this.

Meanwhile, on August 3, the Senate voted overwhelmingly to even further expand NATO, approving the admission of Finland and Sweden into this criminal alliance for the waging of imperialist war. Needless to say, those voting “yea” included a certain Vermont senator named Bernie Sanders. ■

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018; *Revolution* No. 15, September 2018; *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021; and others.

<sup>2</sup> “Bipartisan War Criminals Celebrate War Hawk John McCain,” *The Internationalist*, September 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See “Imperialist Feminism and the Democrats,” *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019; and “The Truth About Cuba Protests: Defend the Revolution Against U.S. Imperialism and Its Frontmen,” *The Internationalist* No. 64, July-September 2021.



# The Russians...

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huge humiliation for the Yankee imperialists. Facing the threat of further, escalated aggression, the Cuban government agreed to USSR premier Nikita Khrushchev's proposal that they host Soviet missiles (partly in response to JFK installing nuclear-armed missiles in Turkey). Kennedy threatened to start a nuclear war unless the Russians backed down. Khrushchev "blinked first" and agreed to remove the missiles (in exchange for the U.S. removing its nukes from Turkey). Though the crisis abated, it brought home to Americans the possibility of nuclear war. Capitalizing on this, anti-communist propagandists sought to fan anti-Russian sentiment to all-time highs.

Hollywood had already gone to town churning out Red Scare productions in the late 1940s and the '50s, bombarding moviegoers with dreck like *I Married a Communist* (1949), *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951) and similar films. The sci-fi genre pitched in too, with horror flicks like the 1956 McCarthyite allegory *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. But by the 1960s, the growing civil rights movement was causing cracks in the "Cold War consensus." Doubts about the nature of U.S. society and its claims to represent freedom and justice were further spurred, particularly among young people, by the Missile Crisis and then the escalation of JFK's war against the Vietnamese Revolution, by his Democratic successor Lyndon Johnson. Some movies began to reflect this.

The 1964 film *Fail-Safe* depicted the U.S. Strategic Air Command mistakenly thinking the Soviets were attacking, then being unable to get all the U.S. bomber pilots to turn back from their mission of H-bombing<sup>3</sup> the USSR. Pentagon brass eager for WWII are outdone by their advisor ("Professor Groetschele"), who casually mentions his "rough calculations based on the effect of two twenty megaton bombs dropped on New York City on a normal workday," with "the immediate dead at about three million" and millions more thereafter. Calling for a U.S. "first strike," he assures the military that the U.S. will win the war, while stressing the priority of rescuing the documents of "our large corporations" headquartered in NYC.

The insane nuclear brinkmanship depicted in *Fail-Safe* had actually been parodied in late 1963 in Stanley Kubrick's brilliant film *Dr. Strangelove: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. Daniel Ellsberg, the former RAND analyst later known for leaking the *Pentagon Papers* in 1971, tells how analysts and planners were shocked by how accurately *Dr. Strangelove* portrayed American nuclear policy. As in the film, a large number of military personnel had the ability to launch nuclear attacks of their own volition, and once launched, the weapons were impossible to recall.<sup>4</sup>

In *Dr. Strangelove*, the title character, happy that a third world war has finally arrived, is a Groetschele-like nuclear "expert" who is a composite of real-life U.S. rocket scientist Wehrner von Braun (who had built the V-2 rockets for Hitler in WWII),

<sup>3</sup> The hydrogen bomb or H-bomb was developed by the United States in 1952. These warheads are as much as a thousand times more powerful than the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* (2017).



**"Emergency! Everybody to get from street!" Still from the 1967 Cold War parody film *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*.**

H-bomb developer and war enthusiast Edward Teller, and Herman Kahn, a "theorist" for the Air Force-affiliated RAND Corporation. Kahn was famous for his 1962 book *Thinking About the Unthinkable*, in which he argued that winning a nuclear war was possible.<sup>5</sup> Today, the cheerfully deranged NYC Emergency Management PSA seems to reflect a similarly crazed mindset.

## **"Emergency, Everybody to Get from Street!"**

These days, as we're told to "prepare" for "the big one" – and fear "invasion" by the music of dead Russian composers, living Russian opera singers, Russian vodka and/or caviar (though we don't know anyone who could afford that) – a bit of comic relief can sometimes come in handy. The reason this article is titled "*The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming*" is that this was the title of a 1966 film that presented a perceptive *parody* of Cold War propaganda. We wanted to contrast it with the real war propaganda exemplified right now by things like the NYC "big one" PSA.

In the 1966 "war comedy," a Soviet submarine (whose captain is played by folk singer Theodore Bikel) runs aground on the fictional island of New Gloucester, somewhere off the coast of New England. The ensuing 120 minutes feature the sub's crew attempting to escape the island, donning disguises and trying to communicate with the townsfolk. At one point (misguidedly attempting to sound like locals), they practice declaiming "Emergency! Everybody to get from street!" A series of miscommunications leads to the island's inhabitants mobilizing against an imagined invasion by Russian paratroopers and the Soviet Navy.

The movie's faux-melodramatic climax has sailors rescuing a young boy from a church steeple. The townspeople then decide to help the submarine escape the danger of military confrontation, surrounding it with a flotilla of fishing boats and dinghies as it heads back out to sea. U.S. Air Force fighter jets watch from above, powerless to stop the sub from slipping away. In the final scene, the town drunk mounts his horse and, Paul Revere-style (with "Yankee Doodle" playing in the soundtrack), rides around the island, belatedly alerting citizens: "The Russians are coming, the Russians are coming!"

In the film, the "red menace" turns out to consist of some bumbling Soviet sailors. Together with its portrayal of small-town provincialism and the obligatory shmaltzy love story (between a local girl and a nice Russian boy from the sub), it showed "the enemy" as essentially like "us." At that time, such sentiment cut against the previously

<sup>5</sup> See "We Meet Dr. Strangelove Again in Washington," *The Internationalist*, May 2022.

overwhelming Cold War fear-mongering and saber-rattling. But if *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming* sought to defuse nuclear anxiety, plenty of others would continue to ramp up the fear.

Hollywood's production of anti-communist propaganda films would experience a new boom in the '80s under Reagan. Some of these have entered the red-white-and-blue patriotic canon, like *Rocky IV* (1984), *Red Dawn* (1985) and the *Rambo* series. However, the decade also produced some films which pointed to the impossibility of American military strategists' search for a scenario in which the U.S. would come out on top in a nuclear exchange. Foremost among these was 1983's TV movie *The Day After*, which shocked Americans with images of nuclear bombs falling on the Kansas-Missouri border. (The British public was horrified by *Threads* [1984], portraying the aftermath of a nuclear attack in England's North.) If the bombs fell anywhere, the American heartland would not be spared...

## **Nuclear Armageddon Made in USA**

While in 1983 American TV audiences were shocked by imaginary nukes falling on Kansas City, in real life the U.S. was busy deploying more actual nuclear weapons across Western Europe, aimed directly at the Soviet Union. Since the end of World War II, U.S. imperialism had been hard at work ramping up the threat of nuclear devastation. While the public is taught to fear the Russians, the United States – the only country ever to *use* nuclear weapons – has always been, and remains, the world's No. 1 nuclear threat. (See box on next page.)

To this day, American schoolchildren are taught that the U.S. mass murder of the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 was "necessary" to "save American lives." In reality, the nuclear attacks that killed hundreds of thousands in the blink of an eye were warning shots heralding the imperialist offensive on the Soviet Union we know as the Cold War. (Meanwhile even the likes of ex-general and president Dwight Eisenhower, who played a key role in expanding U.S. nuclear weaponry, later admitted that the criminal bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had little military significance in the inter-imperialist war with Japan.)

In 1949, the imperialists suffered a major setback with the victory of the Chinese Revolution. The smashing of capitalist rule in the huge Asian country led to bitter cries of "Who lost China?" (with Senator Joseph McCarthy making this a war cry for his anti-communist witch hunt). Though from its inception the People's Republic, a deformed workers state, has been governed by a nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy, its

existence is a challenge to imperialist domination throughout Asia and beyond. When China entered the Korean War in late 1950 in response to murderous imperialist intervention by U.S./UN forces, the American military under Democratic president Harry Truman prepared to use nuclear bombs. This underscores the vital duty of the international working class, then as now, to defend China and North Korea against the war-crazy imperialists.

General Douglas MacArthur, commander-in-chief of U.S. forces in Korea, proposed turning northeastern China and northern Korea into a radioactive wasteland.<sup>6</sup> In an interview published after his death, he said he "would have dropped between 30 and 50 atomic bombs on [Chinese] air bases and other depots strung across the neck of Manchuria" (*New York Times*, 9 April 1964). MacArthur also echoed earlier military planners in proposing to implant a "cordon sanitaire" made of radioactive cobalt in China north of the Korean border, which would have rendered the entire border area uninhabitable for decades.

Nuclear warmongers weren't all military brass with Top Secret clearances. In 1951, Tennessee Democratic congressman Albert Gore, Sr. (whose son Al Jr. would become Bill Clinton's VP and run for president in 2000) publicly called for the "dehumanization" of central Korea with "radiological contamination," to create a radioactive no man's land between the North and South (*New York Times*, 17 April 1951). Democratic Senator from Texas and 1988 VP candidate Lloyd Bentsen also publicly demanded that the U.S. drop nuclear bombs on North Korean cities. (Footage of this features in *The Atomic Cafe*, a 1982 documentary based on Cold War-era U.S. newsreels, propaganda films, cartoons and other materials.)

## **Duck and Cover and the "Nuclear Option"**

In the early 1950s, the push to prepare the U.S. population for war against the USSR itself went into overdrive. The "Duck and Cover" campaign launched at the height of the Korean War might strike today's students as laughably absurd, as we watch old newsreels of schoolkids instructed to scramble under their desks for "protection" against a nuclear attack. But making people perform these rituals of fear and organized absurdity was part of the drive to regiment and terrorize them, while casting any doubt or discord as a threat to "national security." The Federal Civil Defense Administration, founded in 1950, got busy disseminating pamphlets like *Facts About Fallout* and *The Family Fallout Shelter*, encouraging Americans to construct such "shelters" in their backyards.

When *Life* magazine (15 September 1961) published a special issue on "How You Can Survive Fallout," it included "A Letter to You from President Kennedy," setting off a wave of "shelter mania." Government propaganda, backed up by what was printed in the papers and glossy magazines, shown on movie and TV screens, taught in schools and preached in pulpits, sent a clear message: Americans needed to prepare for all-out, no-holds-barred nuclear war against Communism.

On 7 April 1954, President Eisenhower delivered his "domino theory" speech, underlining the United States' commitment to anti-communist warfare around the world. Days before, Secretary of State John Foster

<sup>6</sup> See the U.S. Air Force film image reproduced on page 11.



# Mad Bombers on the Loose (in the White House): A Glimpse at the Record

Since dropping A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, U.S. masters of war have “considered,” threatened and planned how to unleash nuclear devastation on countries and peoples across the world. The accompanying article goes into some examples, but there are innumerable others. Here are a few of them.

- John F. Kennedy came so close to starting World War III during the 1962 missile crisis that he drafted a speech announcing air strikes on Cuba. Under JFK, the Air Force chief of staff was General Curtis LeMay, whose WWII bombing campaign destroyed over two thirds of Japan’s cities. Le May was eager to H-bomb Cuba and, as stated in his 1965 autobiography, believed the U.S. should bomb North Vietnam “back into to the Stone Age.”
- In 1969, after North Korea shot down a U.S. spy plane, Richard Nixon ordered nuclear-equipped bombers put on alert to carry out general nuclear war plans.
- U.S. threats to destroy Cuba were, of course, not limited to the Kennedy administration. Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, told him during a National Security Council meeting: “You just give me the word and I’ll turn that fucking island

into a parking lot.”

- Testing the mic before a 1984 radio broadcast, Reagan “joked”: “My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.”
- Four decades after Democrat Harry Truman’s genocidal war against Korea, Colin Powell – the Republican war criminal who pumped out lies about “weapons of mass destruction” in order to prepare the way for the Iraq War – said the U.S. could “turn North Korea into a charcoal briquette.” In 2016, Barack Obama said the U.S. “could, obviously, destroy North Korea with our arsenals.”
- In 2017, Donald Trump famously threatened to unleash “fire and fury” on North Korea “like the world has never seen.” In reality, the United States has already delivered apocalyptic levels of devastation to the small country. During the Korean War, it killed 3 million people, dropped 635,000 tons of explosives and destroyed nearly every building in the country.<sup>1</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> See “That time a drunk Richard Nixon tried to nuke North Korea,” *Business Insider*, 28 October 2017; “U.S. War on North Korea Never Ended” and “U.S. Beats War Drums Over North Korea,” *The Internationalist* Nos. 32 (January-February 2011) and 50 (Winter 2017).

# James P. Cannon on the “Life-and-Death Necessity” of Revolutionary Action

As news spread worldwide about the atomic bombs that the U.S., under Democratic president Harry Truman, unleashed against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, James P. Cannon (founder of U.S. Trotskyism) spoke out against this horrific imperialist crime – and what it foretold. Cannon warned that “American imperialism and its satellites in other countries” would, unless world revolution defeated them, use the terrifying new weapon in new wars against the peoples of the world. “Revolutionary action,” he insisted, is a “life-and-death necessity for hundreds and millions of people.”

In his speech, part of a commemoration of Leon Trotsky five years after the Russian revolutionary leader’s 20 August 1940 assassination, Cannon stressed the urgency of building a party capable of leading the workers and oppressed in a victorious “revolutionary attack against our main enemy and the main enemy of mankind, the imperialists of the United States.” Speaking less than two weeks after the second of the two A-bombings, he said:

“Before the Second World War, with all its horror and destruction of human life and human culture, is formally ended, they are already thinking and

planning for the third.

“Don’t we have to stop these madmen and take power out of their hands? Can we doubt that the peoples of all the world are thinking it cannot go much further, that there must be some way to change it? Long ago the revolutionary Marxists said that the alternative facing humanity was either socialism or a new barbarism, that capitalism threatens to go down in ruins and drag civilization with it.

“But in the light of what has been developed in this war and is projected for the future, I think we can say now that the alternative can be made even more precise: The alternative facing mankind is socialism or annihilation! It is a problem of whether capitalism is allowed to remain or whether the human race is to continue to survive on this planet. We believe that the people of the world will waken to this frightful alternative and act in time to save themselves.”

What this meant was a fight for *international socialist revolution*. In 2022, long after Cannon so clearly pointed out the danger and how it had to be faced, the threats and weaponry of imperialist barbarism have grown exponentially. So too has the urgency of our revolutionary task. ■

Dulles had offered to provide France with two nuclear weapons for its war against Ho Chi Minh’s Communist-led independence forces in Vietnam: one for the French colonialists to use against China, and one to relieve the French forces at Dien Bien Phu (where the French army was soon defeated by the heroic Vietnamese). Richard Nixon, then vice president, was one of the most enthusiastic proponents of a nuclear strike on the Vietnamese in 1954; he would voice similar sentiments when the U.S. waged its own war in Vietnam.

With the aging Republican Eisenhower followed in the White House by “boyish” Democratic Cold War hawk Kennedy, U.S. imperialism intensified bloody counterinsurgency in Indochina, seeking to prop up its puppet state of “South Vietnam.” With the war’s massive escalation under JFK’s successor Johnson, General William Westmoreland became commander-in-chief of U.S. forces. (Imperialist racism was personified by mass murderer Westmoreland, who stated: “The Oriental doesn’t put the same high price on life as does a Westerner.”)

In 1968, to avert defeat in one of the Vietnam War’s biggest battles, at Khe Sanh, Westmoreland floated the idea of a “small tactical” nuclear strike. As shown in papers declassified 50 years later, Westmoreland actually activated a plan to move nuclear weapons to South Vietnam, until he was overruled by then-president Lyndon Johnson (*New York Times*, 6 October 2018). Upon taking office as president in 1969, Nixon considered using nuclear weapons in Vietnam, he later revealed in an interview

with *Time* magazine (21 July 1985), adding that this was one of four different situations during his presidency when he had considered the “nuclear option.” In fact, aides to Nixon and arch-war-criminal Henry Kissinger tell of constant talk about nuclear strike options throughout the war. In late 1969, Nixon secretly ordered nuclear-armed B-52 bombers placed on “combat-ready status” as a threat to the Soviet Union.

As noted above, Daniel Ellsberg is best known for leaking the *Pentagon Papers*. He subsequently related how he had become disillusioned in U.S. nuclear war strategy when, as a RAND analyst, he learned that U.S. “general war plans” would have resulted in roughly 600 million direct deaths, including not only the Soviet Union and China but also “collateral damage” in neutral and even U.S.-allied countries. (For example, Finland’s population would have been wiped off the map by U.S. nuclear strikes on Leningrad.) The U.S. anti-Soviet and anti-China nuclear war plans were genocidal in every sense of the word.

## Nuclear Barbarism or Socialist Revolution

Ellsberg notes that nearly all (if not all) presidents since Truman have threatened the use of nuclear weapons. What about today? Earlier this year, President Joe Biden (violating a campaign promise) signed off on a “fundamental role” nuclear weapons policy that leaves the door open for first use of nuclear weapons by the United States. The Biden administration’s 2022 Nuclear Posture review is also expected to continue

on with Trump-era plans to upgrade land-and-submarine-based nuclear missiles as well as nuclear-armed bombers. In lock-step with the White House and Pentagon, liberal (and not-so-liberal) Democrats outdo even Trump in beating the war drums.

Biden’s administration has further escalated anti-China saber-rattling with China over the past two years. And now on August 2, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in a direct challenge to the longstanding policy, agreed to by the U.S. in 1972, that “there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China.”<sup>7</sup> Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and 25 other Republican Senators released a statement of support for Pelosi, in a show of bipartisan war-mongering reminiscent of old times. In an op-ed for the *Washington Post* (2 August), Pelosi writes that “we cannot stand by as the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] proceeds to threaten Taiwan – and democracy [*sic*] itself.” (Taiwan was the refuge of Chinese Nationalist dictator Chiang Kai-shek’s bloody counterrevolutionary army when it was defeated in 1949.) Pelosi goes on to link China and the war in Ukraine and asserts “it is essential that America and its allies make clear that we never give in to autocrats.”

In the 1950s, Taiwan-related U.S. provocations led to some of the tensest nuclear crises of the Cold War. In 1954-55 and ’58, forces of the People’s Republic of China clashed with Nationalist soldiers on islands off the coast of mainland China. Unbeknownst to the U.S. public, this conflict over a few small islands very nearly led

<sup>7</sup> “Joint Communiqué between the United States and China,” 27 February 1972.

to a nuclear response by the United States. Christian Herter, successor as Secretary of State to John Foster Dulles, regarded “the Quemoy crisis” in 1958, when the People’s Republic of China shelled Taiwanese military installations on Quemoy Island and the Matsu archipelago, as “the first serious nuclear crisis” of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup>

Today, as throughout the Cold War, the U.S. has nuclear missiles stationed in bases across Western Europe; aimed directly at the USSR until its dissolution, since then they’ve been aimed at Russia. With the current war set off by the U.S./NATO drive to encircle post-Soviet, now-capitalist Russia, the decades-old “doomsday clock” ticks closer to nuclear midnight. As we have indicated here, history amply shows that U.S. imperialism poses the biggest, clear and present, danger to the world. Intransigently opposing “our own” imperialist bourgeoisie, revolutionaries call for revolutionary internationalist struggle to *defeat* its ongoing war drive against Russia and China.

So there’s a reason why our rulers want us scared, ready to duck and cover, obey the war-drunk generals, Democratic/Republican politicians and media hacks – it’s part of a concerted effort by the ruling class to keep the “home front” in line as they loot and pillage around the world. While the New York City government says “don’t ask me how or why” nuclear apocalypse could engulf the world, revolutionaries need to pose precisely these questions to pierce through the veil of propaganda we face every day. ■

<sup>8</sup> Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine*.



# Why RIY...

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more theoretical pieces, most of which I didn't fully understand at the time.

But what I understood almost immediately was that what Bernie Sanders was putting forth was *not* socialism. Socialism is a new society, free from classes, states, exploitation and oppression –the antithesis of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> To open the way for it requires a workers revolution. Real revolutionaries seek to *smash* capitalist rule, which cannot be reformed away. I couldn't see Bernie Sanders or the most supposedly "progressive" parts of the Democratic Party achieving this. Reading the works of Marx, Engels and Cannon displayed the contradictions and emptiness of Bernie Sanders' program, but I was still left with the burning question of what to do about everything I hated so much about capitalist society. What I read was illuminating, but I was turned off by the hyper-academic nature of my high-school "socialist book club," and it posed a major contradiction. The liberal movements in my hometown of Philly talked about "showing up at the ballot box," and even "mobilizing" in the streets, but of course had nothing to do with any concrete analysis of capitalist society, or program against it. And the socialist book club lacked any real plan to put revolutionary ideas into action.

It was a big contrast when, in March 2021, I participated in an International Women's Day forum on "Women, Class Struggle and Revolution" organized by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, which included talks by some RIY members. [Some are reprinted in *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021.] During the forum, I heard a first-hand account of how a courageous group of Mexican immigrant women unionized and mobilized against their intolerable work conditions, wage theft and the abuse they faced from their bosses.

<sup>4</sup> See "No, Bernie Sanders Is *Not* a Socialist," *Revolution* No. 12, March 2016 (reprinted in the Internationalist pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* [2018]); and "Like We Said, Bernie Sanders 'Political Revolution' Was a Scam," *Revolution* No. 17, August 2020.

The forum also went into how these workers were giving voice to the situation of thousands of other women who work in laundry sweatshops across New York City. Other talks discussed the triple oppression that black women workers face under capitalism, and the struggles of women garment workers in Bangladesh and Mexico. And they explained the difference between the Marxist program for women's liberation through socialist revolution and the program of feminism, which ties working-class women to women members of the ruling class, and to the Democratic Party.

For me it was the first time seeing a diverse group of young men and women discussing such topics, with clarity and honesty. It was clear to me that the RIY and the CUNY Internationalist Clubs were serious about learning and gaining clarity on these issues. And they were also serious about *action* – I witnessed this first hand after joining the Internationalist contingent during the 2021 May Day march.

There's still a lot left for me to learn as a young revolutionary, but one thing I am certain of is that it's time for capitalism to meet its end. There's so much to hate about a society that quite literally runs on the exploitation, destitution and despair of the masses – the working class. We don't have to live in a society where women don't have the right to decide whether to give birth, where black people are killed constantly by the police and where immigrant families live in fear that they will either be separated or kept in cages. We don't have to live in a society where people need to choose between their dreams and a job that "pays the rent" – just for that job to not even be able to make ends meet.

But I also know that capitalism cannot be done away with so long as workers and young people alike keep putting illusions into bourgeois politicians whose only interest is to maintain the power of the ruling class. Smashing capitalism requires the political independence of the multiracial, multiethnic, multi-varied working class, led by a vanguard party that will tell the truth and be a "tribune of the people," opposing every kind of oppression. Lastly, and most importantly, smashing capital-

ism, especially here in the center of one of the most vicious and powerful imperialist countries in the world, requires organization and a real seriousness in fighting for a workers revolution to liberate all oppressed people internationally. This is what the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth seeks to do, together with our comrades of the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International, and it seeks to win over young people interested in joining this struggle.

## Luna

I grew up in Oakland, California and Seattle, Washington, with two younger siblings and a white dad and Salvadoran mom. I went to public schools until tenth grade, when I transferred to a private school in Seattle. Unlike most of my classmates, I rode the bus through downtown, where I found myself in the middle of the most concentrated part of Seattle's enormous homeless population, to arrive at the carpeted halls of my artsy private school. This experience gave me a strong curiosity about social issues.

In high school, I encountered a self-congratulatory brand of liberal multicultural politics, which included a "White Faculty Alliance" (!) that met weekly to "discuss their privilege." Yet I had never been in a place where I could talk about politics so openly, and for a time I eagerly took every opportunity available. This included going to national "diversity leadership" conferences; a civil rights road trip through the South; organizing our school's MLK Day events; starting a new re-branded "intersectional feminist" club with other students; and helping organize an anti-racist protest with my friends that led to school being canceled. By junior year I was known as a "social justice activist," part of a clique of similar people.

By senior year in high school, I had become thoroughly disillusioned with liberal politics, but could see no alternative. I began to feel a sinking suspicion that the way people around me understood and talked about oppression and the structure of society was off somehow, that it was missing something fundamental. Soon after I graduated, the online fad of leftist memes inter-

ested me. They taught me nothing practical but presented the concept of a socialist revolution while deriding the Democratic and Republican parties as part of the same beast – ideas I had never heard before. I became really interested in Marxist theory, and last year read Volume I of Marx's *Capital*. This answered some of my long-standing questions and gave me a framework to ask other ones. *Capital* was unlike anything I had ever read; it would be hard to overstate how exciting these ideas were for me.

At the beginning of the Fall 2021 semester, just after moving to New York, I started attending Internationalist Club meetings. The perspective and program appealed to me right away. I did what I could to soak everything up. Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, which a Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (RIY) comrade discussed in detail with me, was a crucial early reading, and was contextualized for me through participating in Club activities, especially our involvement in the Columbia University student workers' strike.

Around the time I met the Internationalist Club, I also met the "International Marxist Tendency," and attended some of their meetings. I broke off contact with the IMT after reading their egregious position supporting police "unions" and "strikes" by cops and prison guards. This was in addition to their lackluster comparison to the Internationalist Group, RIY and CUNY Internationalist Clubs in terms of militancy, participation in demonstrations, and the quality of literature. These were visual and organizational elements that stood out to me strongly when I was new to revolutionary politics.

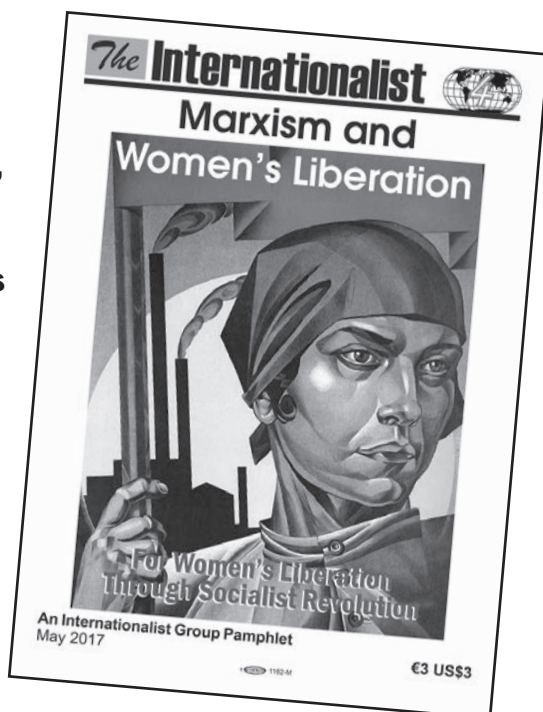
My deep involvement in liberal activism as a teenager could easily have set me up for a fast burnout. Instead, though it took time to find revolutionary ideas (and I was initially navigating them alone), I quickly shed the often cynical outlook of the "radical" flavor of identity politics. After work and study with the RIY, I recently became a member. I believe there are many young people now in a position similar to where I was not long ago, seeking real answers and a fighting program for liberation. Just as I was, unknowingly, I think these people are waiting to encounter the RIY. ■

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# Bolshevik...

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## The October Revolution

Truly radical and revolutionary changes came about with the 1917 October Revolution. Within six weeks of the Bolsheviks leading the working class to power, civil marriage was legalized and either partner could initiate divorce without having to provide any grounds for doing so. This was just the beginning of a new body of laws aimed at dismantling women's oppression and paving the way to liberation. All laws against homosexuality were also abolished. Then in October of 1918, the Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship was ratified. Together with further measures uprooting centuries of women relegation to legal inferiority, it abolished all distinctions between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" children.

The Bolsheviks understood that even the most sweeping changes in laws could not achieve full liberation. However, the measures they undertook right from the beginning pointed the way toward transforming the material conditions and institutions of class society in which women's oppression is rooted, especially the family. Karl Marx's co-thinker Friedrich Engels had analyzed the emergence and evolution of the modern family in his groundbreaking work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). Once human societies developed the capability to produce surplus wealth, those who came to possess that wealth (forming a ruling class) needed a way to securely pass it on to their children. The result was the monogamous family, with notions of "legitimacy" adopted to ensure the transfer of property through paternal lineage. By measures like the 1918 Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship, the Bolsheviks began to undo the precedent for women's oppression set by so many years of class society.

Revolutionary Marxists had long emphasized that for women to be free from oppression they need to be freed from domestic servitude. If woman remained shackled by household drudgery – cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, child-rearing and the rest – then she would continue to be confined to the home. All she would really know would be her private family unit, disconnected from the rest of working society. Together with coeducational schools, workers' clubs and innumerable cultural institutions, the Bolsheviks worked to begin putting into practice the vast task of providing social institutions to replace the centuries-old imprisonment in the home. This meant establishing things like communal laundries and cafeterias, as well as creches and daycare centers, to free women from household burdens and help them enter fully into social labor, political and cultural life. Participating in the workforce was already helping growing numbers of women gain more economic independence.

However, Russia's poverty, the devastation of war and civil war, and the lack of experienced revolutionary leaderships in countries where revolutionary workers were trying to spread the October victory meant that material scarcity and capitalist encirclement drastically limited resources for everything, including this ambitious program. Not only that: these conditions created the basis for the rise of a privileged layer, the parasitic bureaucracy led by Joseph Stalin, which – under the banner of its new, anti-Marxist slogan of "socialism in one country" – broke with the revolutionary internationalist program of Bolshevism and

pursued a conservative, nationalist course.

As part of this, while some important advances for women continued, others were halted or rolled back outright by the Stalinist bureaucracy. One of the most notorious retrograde measures was carried out in 1936, as part of Stalin's push to build up the institution of the family.<sup>6</sup> A new law "On the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood" imposed a near-total ban on abortion, together with making divorce more difficult. Cash bonuses were even provided for mothers with many children. (The Stalin regime also recriminalized homosexuality, setting the pattern for a disgraceful tradition of Stalinist homophobia, which Maoists became especially notorious for promoting.)

Despite Stalinism, the Soviet Union and its collectivized economy continued to produce gains for women. One example is the pioneering work of Soviet clinicians seeking ways to alleviate pain in childbirth. Techniques they worked out would later influence French doctor Fernand Lamaze, who visited the USSR in 1951 as part of a delegation of leftist physicians. Supported in part by the Communist-led French metal workers union, he became the creator of the popular "Lamaze Method" of natural childbirth.<sup>7</sup> While religious authorities in many countries had taught that the pain of childbirth was woman's punishment for Eve's biblical disobedience, Soviet scientists developed ways to help women give birth as painlessly as possible. In 1953, Stalin died. Two years later, under Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, the ban on abortion was repealed. It was only after the capitalist counterrevolution destroyed the USSR in the early '90s that a reactionary abortion ban was once again put in place.

Under capitalism, women's liberation is impossible. The capitalist system requires women's continued oppression in order to maintain the economic and social relations that benefit a small minority of exploiters while the vast majority of humanity suffers. Counterposed to capitalism, socialism requires and is interwoven with the liberation of women on the path to fully actualizing a classless society, in which all the oppressed are freed from the chains of capitalism. So not only would a revolutionary workers state fulfill the call for free abortion on demand, it would be able to defend and guarantee that right. The right of a pregnant person to a safe abortion at their discretion is not a bargaining chip for capitalist politicians to concede and take away when convenient.

Just as a major goal of the Bolsheviks in October 1917 was to attack women's oppression at its roots, that is key for us today. They understood that women's liberation cannot be fulfilled without – and is key to bringing about – a genuinely socialist society in which all forms of social oppression are overcome. The workers of Russia had burning demands and necessities – many of them linked intimately to women's freedom – that they knew could only be met and realized through socialist revolution. It was a revolutionary workers state that brought women closer to genuine liberation than they had ever been since the dawn of class society. Today, young revolutionaries are organizing and working for new red Octobers to fulfill the promise and program shown by trailblazing Bolsheviks a century ago. Join us! ■

<sup>6</sup> Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) provides a crucial analysis of this in the chapter "Thermidor in the Family."

<sup>7</sup> Paula Michaels, *Lamaze: An International History* (2014).

# Join the CIC...

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leftist language, but all in their various ways seek to pressure the Democrats, and stand opposed to revolutionary Marxist politics.

Right now we of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs are a small group with big tasks ahead of us. What we have going for us is a revolutionary program, and a determination to make our deeds match our words. A couple of years after the clubs' formation, we were able to kick military recruiters off the campus of Bronx Community College and to spike a planned "Homeland Security" torture school at Borough of Manhattan Community College. We have led student/worker protests at Hunter College against tuition hikes, in defense of cafeteria workers against union-busting, and in solidarity with the historic workers strike against U.S. imperialism's Iraq/Afghanistan wars, on May 1 2008, when the seaports of the West Coast were shut down by the dock workers union.

We've held educational forums for hundreds of students on issues ranging from imperialist war to the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, the renowned radical journalist and former Black Panther who has been in prison for decades in Pennsylvania, for a crime he didn't commit. We helped organize solidarity with courageous strikers at the University of Puerto Rico; and we work closely with our

comrades in Mexico of the Comité Internacionalista, which arose from the heroic ten-month occupation of Mexico's National University.

We led a campaign against the CUNY administration's provocative political decision to hire war criminal David Petraeus, former CIA chief and ex-commander of the Iraq/Afghanistan wars, to "teach" at CUNY's Macaulay Honors College. In response to Trump's "Muslim ban" in 2017, we initiated the Committee to Defend Immigrants and Muslims. We mobilize CUNY students in support of abortion clinic defenses, striking workers' picket lines and unionization drives like the current ones at Amazon; and against the racist police terror, deportations and imperialist war drive presided over today by Biden and the Democrats.

Over the years and continuing today, a big part of our work has involved active participation in supporting courageous struggles waged by immigrant workers, from the Hot and Crusty bakery near Hunter College to the B&H Photo warehouses and Wash Supply laundromat to the ongoing Cabricanecos campaign of indigenous immigrant construction/demolition workers in New York.

*This is just the beginning.* Join the Internationalist Clubs and join the struggle for a socialist world! ■

Interested? For more information, write to [cunyinternationalists@gmail.com](mailto:cunyinternationalists@gmail.com)

## Claude McKay on the Russian Revolution and Women's Rights



**Claude McKay (right) with leader of Communist International's work among women Clara Zetkin in Moscow, 1922.**

*Claude McKay (1890-1948) was one of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance, widely known for his poem "If We Must Die" (1919) advocating black self-defense in the face of the wave of racist terror that erupted after World War One. Enthusiastically greeting the Bolshevik Revolution, the gay Jamaican-born writer worked with V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky and other revolutionary leaders, addressing the Communist International on the fight for black liberation in the U.S.. In an account of one of his visits to the young Soviet workers state, he wrote:*

*"When the Russian workers overturned their infamous government in 1917, one of the first acts of the new premier, Lenin, was a proclamation greeting all the oppressed peoples throughout the world, exhorting them to organize*

*and unite against the common international oppressor – private capitalism.... I was shown the new status of the Russian women gained through the revolution of 1917. Capable women can fit themselves for any position; equal pay with men for equal work; full pay during the period of pregnancy and no work for the mother two months before and two months after the confinement. Getting a divorce is comparatively easy and not influenced by money power, detective chicanery, and wire pulling. A special department looks into the problems of joint personal property and the guardianship and support of the children. There is no penalty for legal abortion and no legal stigma of illegitimacy attaching to children born out of wedlock."*

*– Claude McKay, "Soviet Russia and the Negro," The Crisis, December 1923*



## PSA for Nuclear War or Cold War Parody?

# “The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming”

By James

“So there’s been a nuclear attack. Don’t ask me how or why, just know that the big one has hit,” declares the stylish young announcer with a smile. *What?!* It’s a chipper, cheery portrayal of nuclear armageddon – brought to you courtesy of the New York City Emergency Management department. And no, it’s not a parody. Titled “Nuclear Preparedness PSA,” it’s an official public service announcement. Creepily surreal, it’s scary as hell – because it’s designed to line us up for a third world war. (You can watch the PSA on the NYC Emergency Management YouTube channel.)

Released on July 11, the bizarre 90-second video features a few random piles of CGI rubble surrounding a row of intact brownstones and a young woman giving such sage advice on what to do if the “big one” hits as: “Get inside, fast,” and “Shut all doors and windows.” Exposed to radiation? Take a shower! (Like running water, or your building, or NYC would still exist...) Don’t worry, the PSA chirps: “You’ve got this.” You’ve got to be kidding.

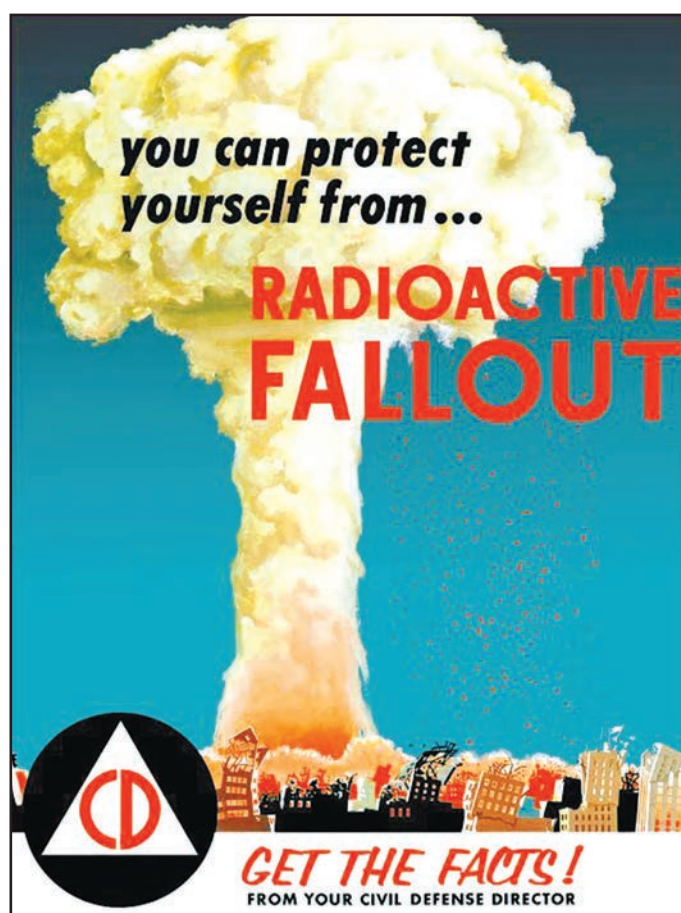
But they’re not – and New Yorkers are worrying. NBC News (11 August) reports that Google searches for “fallout shelters near me” skyrocketed in the second week of August. Reporters asked city officials what on earth they were thinking and why they green-lighted the PSA. In a statement, NYC Emergency Management Commissioner Zach Iscol lamely emitted vague statements about the evolving “threat landscape.” At a July 12 press conference, Mayor Eric Adams dismissed criticism of the PSA, saying “I don’t think it was alarmist – I’m a big believer in ‘better safe than sorry’.” But later at the same event he said he thought it was a

“great idea” that, “after the attacks in the Ukraine,” the Emergency Management office “took a very proactive step to say, ‘Let’s be prepared’.”

The spectre evoked by the Mayor’s Office, of the Russians suddenly dropping “the big one” on New York, is part of prepping, lining up and regimenting the American public for war. Having provoked the nationalist Russia-Ukraine war, the U.S. and NATO seized on it for further NATO expansion and keep pushing more each day, in close connection with the imperialist war drive against China. Nearly 70% of the U.S. public “fear that we are at the beginning stages of World War III,”<sup>1</sup> a survey found back in March. Parlaying fear into war “preparedness”<sup>2</sup> is the sick logic behind July’s “an-

<sup>1</sup> “Stress in America: Money, inflation, war pile on to nation stuck in COVID-19 survival mode,” American Psychological Association, March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> An NYC “Preparedness Parade” helped pave the way for U.S. entry into World War One (see front-page article “You Furnish the Pictures, and I’ll Furnish the War”).



Federal Civil Defense Administration 1955 Cold War propaganda poster, part of U.S. imperialist “preparedness” campaign for a nuclear WWII.

nouncement” on how New Yorkers can supposedly survive a nuclear war. Eerily, it echoes phrases from the infamous 1951 Civil Defense film “Duck and Cover” on “what to do if the atom bomb explodes right now.”

NYC’s 2022 version goes together with the organized onslaught of anti-Russian hysteria that has combined all manner of exclusions and bans with war sanctions. In one country after another, Russian musicians have been banned from stages, athletes have been excluded from international sporting events, and Russian products have disappeared from shelves (see “Beethoven Bans and ‘Liberty Cabbage’” on page 13).

Fear and loathing of “the enemy” are the name of the game, as capitalist rulers preach “preparedness” as part of herding the populace to the slaughter. The irrationality of the capitalist system is such that being scared out of your wits most of the time is supposed to be the new normal. The threat of another world war, this time with nuclear weapons, is all too real. There is no cure for this madness within the capitalist system – moral-suasion “peace” appeals won’t do it. Only socialist revolution here and around the world can put an end to U.S. imperialism’s escalating drive toward a Third World War.

## Cold War and Nuclear Brinkmanship

But wait – wasn’t the Cold War supposedly over ages ago? Starting from the October Revolution of 1917 and ramping up during the post-WWII Cold War, the U.S. government and media stoked hatred and fear of the “godless Russkies” for decades. (The Revolution itself was met with armed intervention by the U.S. and 13 other capitalist countries.) After three quarters of a century, in the early 1990’s the anti-Soviet drive culminated in a capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR. Decades of Stalinist misrule had undermined the Soviet workers state, as Leon Trotsky (co-leader with Lenin of the 1917 revolution) had warned. Defending the gains of October against imperialism was crucial for workers all around the world, Trotskyists emphasized, explaining that to head off the danger of capitalist counterrevolution, a workers “political revolution” was necessary to restore soviet democracy and proletarian internationalism.

With the USSR dismembered and capitalism restored, a huge defeat for the workers and oppressed, for a short while at the turn of the millennium Washington thought it would run the show unchallenged. But Russia, now a regional capitalist power and still armed with nukes, plus the increasing prominence of China, still a bureaucratically deformed workers state and also equipped with a nuclear arsenal, were increasingly viewed as an intolerable obstacle and “danger” to U.S. rulers and the dominance they had hoped would be eternal. Waging one war after another around the world, U.S. imperialism sought to reassert that hegemony. Yet these military adventures – as shown most recently in Afghanistan – did not bring “victory” for the U.S. rulers. “Pivoting” to Asia, they escalated their war drive against China. In tandem with this, they targeted Russia for nuclear encirclement through NATO’s relentless eastward expansion, violating promises that the U.S. offered in 1990 to then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. War was only a matter of time. Having made its outbreak inevitable, they are now making the most of it.

A phrase often repeated today is that the danger of nuclear war is closer now than at any time since the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. What happened at that peak of Cold War fear, almost exactly six decades ago? Democratic darling John F. Kennedy had failed in his attempt to overthrow the Cuban Revolution with the Bay of Pigs invasion. The defeat of his mercenary invaders was a big victory for oppressed peoples everywhere, and a

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Still from July 2022 NYC public service announcement telling people to “follow media” and “shower with soap or shampoo” in the aftermath of a “nuclear attack” (like any of that would work after what it calls “the big one”).