

Clarity on Ukraine: An ATC Editors' Statement on the War

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A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

AGAINST THE CURRENT

Woman,
life,
freedom!

Zan,
Zendegi,
Azadi!

Jin,
Jiyan,
Azadi!



**Reflections on
Iran's Uprising**

◆ CATHERINE Z. SAMEH

**Banning Abortion,
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Imperialism Today, East and West

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A Letter from the Editors

Clarity on Ukraine

AS RUSSIA'S INVASION and its global impacts spread with ruinous impact, it's high time for factual, political and moral clarity on what this war is about. That requires sorting out a great deal of ideological mythology on all sides. It shouldn't be surprising, we suppose, that this war has cut through usual political dividing lines on the right as well as the left.

There's a barely disguised pro-Putin wing in the U.S. Republican Party, generally aligned with Trump/MAGA forces. More "traditional" neoconservative militarists (and some of the Democratic establishment) see an opportunity to use Ukraine as the battering ram to bring down the Russian regime and cripple its ally China. Others like Henry Kissinger, whose unquestionable imperialist war criminal credentials span four decades of the 20th century, call for Ukrainian "territorial concessions" — meaning surrender and dismemberment — in the interests of stability.

Among parties of the European far right, the German AfD and French Rally (Marine Le Pen) openly sympathize with Russia, while the Polish "Law and Justice" ruling party is militantly pro-NATO, the Hungarian Christian-nationalist regime of Viktor Orban plays both sides, and the newly elected far-right coalition in Italy appears itself to be divided on the war.

The divisions among these reactionary, racist forces and governments are largely conditioned by how to manipulate nationalist sentiments and public fears over Europe's economic woes; by opportunistic hopes of aligning with what will turn out to be the "winning side;" and by the scramble to secure energy from Russian oil and gas in a pending bitter winter.

On the left, meanwhile, the divisions are over the meaning of imperialism and how to oppose it — in particular, the problem posed by a war in which the aggressor is not "our own" imperialist power, as it has been from Vietnam to Afghanistan and Iraq and so many in between. The fact that U.S. imperialism is as vicious and destructive as ever is not the central issue in the present war.

Socialists need to be clear about our position: We support Ukraine's war of national survival and its right to receive assistance. We do *not* support NATO. Thanks to Putin, in fact, NATO and U.S. imperialism have already accomplished strategic goals: NATO's shaky unity is restored, Finland and Sweden are joining, Germany is ramping up its military spending to and probably beyond the two percent of GDP level, and U.S. "leadership" of the alliance is restored.

To help pose the central questions, elsewhere in this issue we publish an excerpt from a powerful statement by Ukrainian and other European leftists. The full text is posted on the ATC website.

First and foremost, this statement presents a powerful case for Ukraine's right of self-defense against a brutal Russian invasion. The fundamental reality is that this invasion has explicitly stated annexationist objectives and, were it to succeed, a genocidal trajectory that's already been evidenced in the slaughters of civilians and forced population removals in Russian-occupied territory.

The statement is also clear about the imperialist character of NATO, what it stands for, and the demand for its dissolution and the forging of an anti-militarist alternative to great-power blocs. While addressing a document from part of the German left, its arguments are highly relevant to the debate in the U.S. left, where sectors of the peace movement

THIS ISSUE OF *Against the Current* goes to press before the U.S. November midterm elections, but will reach many readers afterward. Assessments of the results, and prospects for the U.S. political crisis going forward, will appear in our next issue and advance posts at <https://againstthecurrent.org>. ■

oppose Ukraine's right to obtain weapons on the grounds that "arming Ukraine only prolongs the war and suffering."

These forces, we are sorry to say, include pacifist-leaning organizations — including CodePink, RootsAction and

World Beyond War — that have done excellent work around many issues such as the U.S.-Saudi-backed war in Yemen, Washington's sadistic cutoff of Afghanistan's foreign reserves, and more.

It is painful to see these groups' inability to understand the legitimacy of Ukraine's war against Putin's invasion, or the deluded notion that Ukrainian surrender or acceptance of territorial amputation would bring "peace through negotiations," or even the unworldly idea that peaceful resistance by itself would turn back Russian tanks.

A Proxy War?

We don't suggest these antiwar voices are supporters of Putin, or that they're anything but sincere in their horror — which anyone with human feelings must fully share — over the death and destruction that's being inflicted every day on Ukraine and its people.

Rather, the problem is their disorientation over a war that's not "our own" imperialist crime — and their refusal to address the issue of Ukraine's right of self-defense. CodePink and RootsAction representatives in particular have declined to answer this question when repeatedly and directly asked. To be sure, they voice their support of Russian draft refusers and the revived Russian antiwar movement, which represents a great hope for us all — but that stance doesn't respond to Ukraine's rights.

To justify this unacceptable evasion, some of the U.S. peace movement, along with the International Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America, have come up with the formula of a "proxy war" in Ukraine between the United States and NATO on one side, versus Russia on the other, such that supporting Ukraine's right to receive weapons means backing "our" imperialist side.

The argument is seductive because it sounds principled, because it points the finger at NATO's aggressive post-1991 expansion to Russia's borders, and because it reflects an aspect of reality — but in a highly distorted way. (For some discussion of these issues see our earlier editorial in ATC 218, "Out of the Imperial Order: Chaos" and a statement by Solidarity, <https://solidarity-us.org/russia-out-of-ukraine->

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Front Cover: Jina/Masha Amini, whose name will not be forgotten. Graphic by Lisa Lyons
Above: October 8, 2022 demonstration in Madison, WI, where a 1809 anti-abortion law came into effect after the federal right to abortion was overturned. Marsha Rummel

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AI-Monitor

Reflections on “In Her Name” The Meaning of Iran’s Uprising

By Catherine Z. Sameh

ON WEDNESDAY, September 28, the Middle East news site *Jadaliyya* hosted a live conversation on its Facebook and YouTube channels with five feminist scholars of Iran and its diasporas to discuss the current anti-government protests, sparked by the killing of Jina/Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish Iranian arrested for “improper” hijab. (“In Her Name: Women Rising, State Violence, and the Future of Iran”)

I was privileged to be included in this group. In what follows, I offer some salient points from our collective discussion by way of my individual, post-event reflections.

Continuities and Ruptures

Feminist activism in Iran is not new. The current uprising is the latest chapter in well over a century of feminist and women’s rights activism in Iran. From the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 to the revolution of 1979, from the One Million Signatures Campaign of 2006-2009 to the Green Movement of 2009 to the economic protests of 2019, women have always been present as key social actors.

They have struggled alongside larger

sectors of society, and autonomously, for democratization and gender equality. In the years and decades following the revolution, women pushed back against a discriminatory legal structure at odds with their enormous presence in society.

What is unfolding now reflects a break with the reform-oriented struggles of the last several decades. The ramping up of surveillance of women’s dress by the morality police under hard-right president Ebrahim Raisi, profound mismanagement of the COVID pandemic and the economy by the government, deepening socio-economic hardship, inflation, sanctions against and isolation of Iran — all have combined to gather the population’s widespread immiseration and anger under the sign of Amini’s death.

Most important is the fact that women, most of them young, are leading this movement, that gender justice and women’s liberation are at the very heart of its demands, and that protesters are demanding an end to the Islamic Republic and any new forms of patriarchal authoritarianism.

Against Compulsion

The first feminist demonstration in the weeks following the 1979 revolution was in response to Khomeini’s imposition of the mandatory hijab. In the decades since, an end to compulsory hijab had not been the central or most pressing issue around which

feminists have organized.

In periods of reform governments, particularly under Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), surveillance of women’s dress and hijab loosened, and issues like citizenship status, rights in marriage and divorce, and custody of children became more pressing and potentially winnable.

The corporeal tactics of the current protesters — burning their hijabs in the streets, cutting their hair in public and online, sitting in cafes without hijabs and mandatory loose clothing — are now most decidedly a demand to end compulsory hijab in Iran.

Self-Determination and Feminism

These are not protests against Islam, nor are they against the choice to wear hijab. They are about a refusal to be conscripted into a state regime that sacrifices women’s bodies and lives in the name of national sovereignty and security. Women with and without hijab are protesting together, and there is widespread belief in the society that hijab must be voluntary.

Compulsory hijab in Iran is a material and symbolic weapon that constructs gendered forms of citizenship through surveillance, forced allegiance and violence, as are the actual and suggested bans on veiling and other forms of Islamic dress — from India to France to the United States.

While central to the uprising, an end to

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compulsory hijab is not the final frontier of the movement and its aspirations. This is a remarkable upsurge that unites many sectors of society — women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, students, labor unions, artists, queer people — who are utterly fed up with politics as usual.

It is deeply feminist in that it dreams of vast, systemic change and an end to patriarchal authority and political structures that violently militate against the freedom and democratic participation of everyone.

Women in Iran have struggled for feminism and gender equality for over a century, but often their particular visions and specific demands have been sidelined through an “after the revolution” politics. In the current struggle, a struggle for the self-determination of Iranian people, women’s and feminist issues are the heart and soul.

Protesters are putting their bodies on the street to demand their bodily and political freedom. Women are no longer willing

to defer their autonomy to a future that will never come. Women’s freedom is the sign under which this new world-making unfolds. *Jin. Jiyān. Azādī. Zan. Zendegī. Azādī. Woman. Life. Freedom.*

Transnational Solidarity from Below

As I write, we are heading into a weekend (October 1 and 2) full of global demonstrations of solidarity with the Iranian people.

The October 2 demonstrations are specifically a call from Iranian feminists — some of whom were active in the One Million Signatures Campaign — to stand with them. Not to speak on their behalf, but to stand with them in support of the movement in Iran and against patriarchal authoritarianisms everywhere.

The protesters are asking for international solidarity. Not intervention, but solidarity. Not sanctions, but solidarity. As transnational feminists, we must build these visions of sol-

idarity from below and not concede ground to the so-called anti-imperialist posturing of Raisi (or Putin or any other patriarchal dictator), nor the interventionist politics of so-called targeted sanctions.

Feminists around the world, from Afghanistan to India to Sudan, have been inspired by the movement in Iran, writing statements of solidarity. They are linking the feminist uprising in Iran to their own struggles for self-determination and bodily integrity, and an end to patriarchal nationalism and authoritarianism — be it Islamic, Hindu, secular or otherwise.

Many feminists in the United States, Iran and elsewhere are connecting the movement in Iran to the struggle for abortion and reproductive justice in the United States. These kinds of robust connections around differently located but connected struggles around bodily autonomy, democratic participation, and self-determination are precisely what transnational feminist activists and scholars have been building for decades.

The Feminist Future is Now

This is a moment to deepen and renew this political and intellectual tradition. Whatever the outcome of this uprising, the breathtakingly courageous Iranian women and their many-gendered comrades are an inspiration to a world in crisis.

They are refusing conscription into patriarchal authoritarianism and forms of national belonging that are built on violence, surveillance, securitization, gender-differentiated citizenship and belonging, and a drive towards multiple forms of death.

They are building on a deep and long history of feminist struggle, and at the same time creating something new. Finding each other in the street, these protesters — like so many protesters around the world — want a different world.

They want a world free from militarized violence, from state and national politics that organize and divide people along lines of inequality and oppression, from gender violence and discrimination, from incarceration, from the many forms of socio-economic immiseration, precarity and isolation.

They long for a feminist world of love and care, of unity and solidarity, a world that affirms women and life and freedom. In the face of enormous state repression and violence, they are building such a world. ■

Solidarity with the Protest Movement in Iran!

THE FOLLOWING IS an excerpt from an October 18th statement of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International. The full text is at <https://fourth.international/en/566/middle-east/475>

UNLIKE PREVIOUS UNREST, such as the rebellion against electoral fraud (2009) or protests against rising fuel prices (2019), the rallying cry in the forefront is “Down with the Islamic Republic!” After a month of protests the movement is still going strong and spreading.

Compared to past decades, the social hardship among the population is even greater today. More than half of the population lives below the subsistence level and can only survive with a lot of difficulties. Health care has become even more inadequate than it already was. The ecological damage is enormous, with severe water shortages, desertification and deforestation affecting the rural population particularly, and high levels of air and water pollution in the cities.

What is striking and enthusing is that the movement is led by young women, including school students. This is fed by the history of women’s struggles and movements in Iran since before the days of the 1979 revolution. Popular support is based on a now widely shared hatred of the regime and of the corrupt theocratic clique that dominates and exploits the country, enriching itself to the point of becoming dollar billionaires.

The fact that the movement has lasted for so long and on such a broad scale, despite the harsh repression, can only be explained by the anger felt above all by the younger generations. Broad sections of the students and pupils who are resisting their confinement and taking to the streets for a different life.

The second specificity of today’s wave of protest is that it has spread from Jīna (Mahsa) Amini’s home city in Kurdistan throughout the country. This is why the Kurdish chant “Jin Jiyān Azādī” translated to Persian as “Zan Zendegī Azādī” has become the main slogan of the movement today. In Kurdistan, the rejection of the theocratic regime and the struggle for self-determination have a long tradition and are being expressed with force. What is new is the scale of the protests in Baluchistan, where social oppression and massive poverty are the worst in the country. The repression there manifested itself, for example, on 7 October when more than 100 people were shot dead during a demonstration in the provincial capital Zahedan.

It is solely up to the people of Iran to determine their own destiny, with full democratic rights and gender equality, with religious freedom and secularism, defending the rights of all minorities and working for social and economic justice.

Woman, life, freedom! — Zan, Zendegī, Azādī! — Jin, Jiyān, Azādī! ■

Notes

1. <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/44469/In-Her-Name-Women-Rising-State-Violence-and-the-Future-of-Iran-Video>
2. As I write, students protesting at Sharif University in Tehran have been beaten and arrested, while others have been trapped on campus. When police let the trapped students leave, they began shooting them with rubber bullets.
3. Many of these statements will be posted here in weeks to come: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Country/47/Iran>

Patriarchy's Global Reach: Surveilling and Judging Women

By Dianne Feeley

PATRIARCHAL POLITICIANS AND rulers pass judgment on women and those who defy sexual stereotypes, imposing laws to empower “morality police” the world over — Iran, Afghanistan, India and Saudi Arabia; Poland, El Salvador and the USA.

Women's struggles for bodily autonomy, reproductive freedom and security from violence are the center of today's fights to defend democratic rights for all. Women (and those who define themselves as non-binary) face this gauntlet of restrictions because the patriarchy sees them as threatening the “public order” — by symbolizing men's sexual desires, which need to be constrained by rendering women invisible.

Those who become visible face almost-certain harm. For some, like 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian Jina/Mahama Amini, the judgment may end with a fatal beating. In other cases, it may be sexual harassment in the workplace. It might result in being raped and disgraced, whether by “date rape” or as a war crime.

In many diverse countries, laws require that all who become pregnant continue the pregnancy. Usually the law criminalizes those who help with an abortion, but in countries like El Salvador even those who endured a miscarriage have been reported, tried and sentenced to prison.

You might ask: *But how can that be in the United States, where women represent more than 50% of college graduates, where we elected a woman of color as vice president, where everywhere provocative and sometimes outlandish ads reveal women's bodies?*

True, we do not live in a Puritanical society. Even evangelical right wingers like Sarah Palin and Tudor Dixon (far-right Republican candidate for Michigan governor) appear stylish on their campaign circuit. But if their ideology and presentation seem contradictory nonetheless the judging continues.

There are the “good” women, who add to their partner's status by being able to handle home-and-work life, dress appropriately — even glamorously. Then there are the less adept (less well resourced). They too can be divided into the ones who regain their balance after an initial fall — whether

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Wisconsin had a 19th century “trigger” law that banned abortion once federal protection under Roe was overturned. On October 8 over 300 people marched at the state capitol in Madison.

Marsha Rummel

drugs, failed marriage, or an abortion that “haunts” them — and those who never “recover.” There are social penalties for those who fail to conform.

Indeed, in the United States we can say that instead of women's invisibility there is just the opposite, a *hypervisibility* that invites constant judging of who is the prettiest, the best dressed, the most accomplished. However, to maintain this facade, they are required to hire a nanny, housekeeper or cleaner who is often a woman of color.

Insofar as the United States has a publicly proclaimed ideology, it is one of “progress.” So the leaking last April of Judge Alito's draft decision, declaring in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that there is no constitutional right to abortion, shocked a public that had more or less assumed that women's right to liberty was a part of the federal constitution.

The legal status of abortion reverted to the various states. Within three months of

the *Dobbs* decision 13 states — mostly in the South and Midwest — had banned abortion outright while others attempted to limit the procedure to the first 5-12 weeks of pregnancy.

But well before the *Dobbs* ruling, state laws forced the pregnant person to jump through a series of legal hoops or demanded clinics provide burdensome and medically superfluous procedures that drove up the cost. While anti-abortion forces claimed such legislation necessary for the “safety” of those seeking abortion, many had been ruled undue burdens under the federal protection of abortion rights.

The *Dobbs* decision also threatens other Supreme Court decisions based on the right to personal liberty; this right flows from the equal protection provisions of the post-Civil War 14th Amendment. Justice Clarence Thomas has proclaimed these up for grabs.

The right to abortion before fetal viability, codified in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), was built on the reasoning outlined in *Griswold v.*

Connecticut, which affirmed the right of married couples to engage in sex without procreation (1965); the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* case affirming the right to racial intermarriage; and *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972) that extended the provisions of *Griswold* to all individuals.

Subsequently the same reasoning formed the basis of *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) upholding the right of consenting adults to have sex with partners of any sex and *Obergefell v. Hodge* (2015), enshrining the right of people to marry regardless of sex.

Zealots Against Women's Rights

Legal commentators have pointed to the flimsy arguments offered to justify reversing a Supreme Court decision almost 50 years old, but it is clear this was a fight waged by religious zealots who were initially forced to adopt the strategy of designing restrictions on abortion in the name of safety.

At the federal level the most important

impediment has been the annual passage of the Hyde Amendment. This bars low-income women from accessing federal Medicare funding for abortion under most circumstances. The right wing asked: "Why should the public be 'forced' to pay for an abortion?" (Only 16 states provide full funding for Medicare abortions.)

Although late abortions represent less than 10% of all abortions and usually result because of severe fetal abnormality, the right wing aggressively campaigns against them.

In 2003 George W. Bush signed into law a bill that opposes a medical procedure used before fetal viability (between 15-24 weeks of pregnancy). Known as intact dilation and extraction — but termed "partial-birth abortion" by the National Right to Life Committee — the method is criminalized if the fetus is still living.

That is, the focus is on the fetus, no matter how abnormal, rather than on the well-being of the pregnant individual. As Linda Greenhouse wrote when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the law legal in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, it promised "to reframe the abortion debate and define the young Roberts court."

"By identifying the intact procedure and giving it the provocative label 'partial-birth abortion,' the movement turned the public focus of the abortion debate from the rights of women to the fate of fetuses. In short order, 30 states banned the procedure." ("Justices Back Ban on Method of Abortion," by Linda Greenhouse, *N.Y. Times*, April 19, 2007.)

Chaos in the States

In addition to the passage of these two federal laws, a host of state legislation limiting access to abortion has built up over the years: mandating a waiting period (one to three days), parental consent laws and a counseling session (with several states providing false information, such as abortions possibly causing breast cancer or mental health issues).

Others proscribed what insurance coverage could be offered, limited or outlawed telemedicine for abortion (but for no other procedure), required an ultrasound in every case or demanded clinics and doctors meet unnecessary standards.

The *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* decision (1992) allowed some restrictions to stand so long as they did not impose an "undue burden" on the pregnant individual. *But what defines an undue burden?*

The 2016 decision, *Whole Women's Health vs. Hellerstedt*, provided a clear answer. The 5-to-3 ruling swept aside the requirement that clinics providing abortion must be ambulatory surgical centers, staffed by doctors with admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles.

While the Texas legislature claimed such

restrictions were necessary, the majority opinion concluded:

"Each [provision] places a substantial obstacle in the path of women seeking a previability abortion, each constitutes an undue burden on abortion access, and each violates the federal Constitution."

This provided the standard against which similar legislation could be measured. But with three Trump appointees added to the Court, there was a majority committed to overthrow the entire *Roe* decision.

States began to pass laws that were in explicit violation of *Roe*, and within a year the Court agreed to hear a case where abortion was banned after 15 weeks, and which had been struck down as unconstitutional by a lower court. The Court's acceptance of this case signaled the writing was on the wall.

Then Texas passed a law that banned abortions after the sixth week. Instead of state officials enforcing the law, SB-8 empowers private citizens to sue anyone involved in helping with the abortion, for which they would be handsomely compensated.

But when abortion providers asked the Supreme Court to block its enforcement while they appealed the obviously unconstitutional law, its failure to act reinforced court watchers' fear that *Roe* would be overturned.

As a result of SB-8, Dallas hospitals were forced to alter their procedures for terminating non-viable pregnancies. A report in the *N.Y. Times* revealed:

"(W)omen had to wait an average of nine days for their conditions to be considered life threatening, enough to justify abortion. Many suffered serious health consequences while they waited, including hemorrhaging and sepsis, and one woman had to have a hysterectomy as a result." ("Roe's Reversal Changes Ways Doctors Work," by Kate Zernike, *N.Y. Times*, September 11, 2022)

Now doctors can face prison and the loss of their license if their judgment call is disputed. Even forensic nurses caring for sexual assault cases are worried that providing the morning-after pill may place them in the right-wing's crosshairs.

Medical personnel are pointing to the vagueness of state abortion laws and their category of exceptions. As the American College of Obstetrician and Gynecologists points out, it is "impossible" and "dangerous" to compile a complete list of medical problems the pregnant person or the embryo/fetus could develop.

Given that annually roughly a million U.S. women suffer miscarriages and stillbirths (10-20% of all pregnancies, more than the number of abortions), some have been viewed as deliberately terminating their pregnancy and arrested. According to the National Advocates for Pregnant Women, between 1973 and 2020, 1700 have faced

charges of feticide, manslaughter, "depraved heart" homicide or homicide by child abuse. Unsurprisingly, those who have been imprisoned are women of color.

With increasing numbers of state abortion bans and fetal rights legislation, miscarriages will be seen as signs of suspicious criminal activity. *Echoes of El Salvador!*

Indeed, under the theocratic doctrine that "life begins at conception," isn't any miscarriage a potential homicide to be investigated? Isn't any woman of reproductive age a container to be filled by a phantom embryo?

This need to legislate the bodies of pregnant people seems particularly ironic given that at least half of those who become pregnant did not choose to do so. Are they to continue the pregnancy under all circumstances? Are their diets and physical activities to be monitored so that the pregnancy continues?

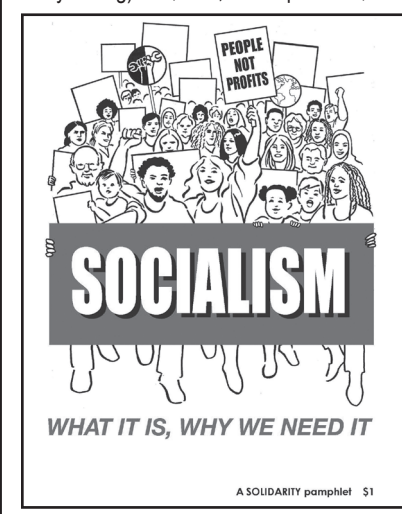
Because we do not have a public health system, many begin their pregnancy in poor health; their high-risk pregnancies ensure that the U.S. rate of infant and maternal death is the highest in the industrial world. Yet if they decide to end their pregnancy, they and those who help them are to be treated with suspicion and face possible criminal charges. Surveillance and control are the watchwords of the day.

Anywhere in the world, judging women's bodies and the decisions they make stands in the way of building societies where each individual has the fundamental right to their own bodily autonomy.

That basic right — whether the state is mandating women to wear a hijab, forcing them to take it off (e.g. in France and India), or forcing a pregnant person to continue the pregnancy at whatever personal and social cost — is essential.

If this right is not recognized, explosions will continue to take place. ■

What distinguishes socialism from other political and economic systems? Order the 24-page pamphlet from Solidarity (<https://solidarity-us.org>) for \$1.50, five copies for \$3.50.



Lessons from Dystopia: Indiana's Abortion Ban

By Maria Bucur

I GREW UP as the effect of a near-total abortion ban. In the 1970s, Communist Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu briefly experienced a bumper crop of children like me, who came about because, starting in 1967, women could have legal abortions only after raising five children into adulthood.

Most of my friends were single children or had at most one sibling. Contraception of any kind was either unavailable or of poor quality (especially condoms). In rural areas, where more than 50% of the population lived, abortion was de facto the only means of controlling fertility long before the Communist takeover and remained so throughout the period of the ban.

Nobody talked about sex as a normal component of our humanity. Sex education was relegated to the realm of obfuscations and double-entendres. Even among loving heterosexual couples, sex was a source of fear for women and anxiety for men.

The justification for the restrictive abortion legislation was the fear that the decline in birth rates would diminish the potential for growth of the labor force. Modernization and productivism demanded more people working to build the workers' paradise.

While women had come to be seen as necessary participants in the labor force, their reproductive capacity rendered them a particular set of workers who also needed to engage in reproductive labor.

Legislation that provided paid maternity leaves up to two years and a growing network of state subsidized creches and kindergartens reflected this outlook. But women ended up performing a double workday, with little change in men's behavior in regard to parenting and household unpaid work.

The abortion ban failed to accomplish the pronatalist goal that had anchored it. The fertility rate went up for a few years and then back down. By 1983, the birth rate had

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gone down to pre-abortion ban levels.

No research that can be trusted was undertaken to understand this vexing outcome. But I speculate that illegal abortions and a lessening of sexual intercourse were the root causes. This explanation points to women as willful agents of their own reproductive potential and to the society wide consequences of an abortion ban.

Significantly, the quality of women's lives went down significantly during that period: "by 1989, Romania had the highest recorded maternal mortality ratio in Europe (170 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births), 87% of which were attributed to abortion complications."

In this context doctors, prosecutors and law enforcement, professions dominated by men, became closely entangled with survival. Surviving a regime that forced you to criminalize your wife and daughter's sexuality. Managing your love life and familial ties to protect those very women from the brutal consequences of their love for you or your

son-in-law.

Would a prosecutor be willing to send to jail the doctor who helped their daughter get an abortion? Would a policeman arrest the person who might help their wife get her next abortion? There are stories of both undermining the enforcement of the law as well as manipulative use of one's power in order to protect one's own women, but turn a blind eye to others, or worse.

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a faint echo of the reality that I and millions of other women lived for two decades.

From Romania to Indiana

Decriminalization of abortion was the second act of the post-Communist regime. Though many forms of religious radicalization have developed in the intervening three decades, few Romanian politicians have attempted to raise the specter of the recriminalization of abortion.

The trauma of those decades of treating

Update

AS SOON AS SBI passed, several lawsuits were filed by groups and organizations dedicated to the protection of full rights for women. In a lawsuit filed by Planned Parenthood in Monroe County, Judge Kelsey Hanlon signed an injunction that pauses the implementation of the new law until the lawsuit is settled. Starting on September 23, 2022, abortion services resumed in Indiana.

What is particularly remarkable in the decision signed by this Republican judge is the specific language she used to describe the potential harm of the law: SBI "materially burdens Hoosier women and girls' right to bodily autonomy by making that autonomy largely contingent upon first experiencing extreme sexual violence or significant loss of physical health or death." (p. 11) Judge Hanlon identified the discrimination as based on gender and named the perverse outcomes of this law with the brutality they deserve: half of the population of Indiana will have full rights only if they are raped or in danger of losing their life. Surely, no contemporary state that dares call itself "civilized" can describe such a law as a reflection or its consideration for human rights.

The text also comes as a strong rebuttal against both Attorney General Todd Rokita and Hanlon's fellow Republican legislators, who have denied the existence of the right to bodily integrity in the Indiana State constitution. In August, testimony after testimony by women speaking about their right to bodily integrity was followed by an aggressive response from Republican representatives, who asked the witnesses to identify the language in the Indiana Constitution that speaks to the right to bodily autonomy. Judge Hanlon has delivered a persuasive interpretation of the Constitution along those lines and is serving it back to people who a year ago were articulating arguments about the constitutional right to bodily autonomy in challenging the federal COVID vaccine mandate for healthcare workers.

The lawsuit continues and will likely have a huge impact on both how bodily integrity is understood in Indiana law, as well as whether a fetus has the same rights in utero as a person. ■



Indiana's passage of the SBI abortion ban represents rule by a minority.

WFYI Indianapolis

people with uteruses as objects of biopolitical control has continued to affect Romanian society — so much so that arguments about the beginning of life at conception and the notion that a fetus is a person do not hold water even with a population that has become more and more religious in word and practice, during the intervening period.

As I watched first the *Dobbs v. Jackson SCOTUS* decision and more recently the debates over and passing of the SBI abortion-ban in Indiana, my initial disbelief turned into anger and quickly into the realization that a low-grade biological war has started in the United States.

This war posits those of us with a uterus as persons with lesser rights, because a small minority of dedicated religious radicals have decided that their version of what a person is should prevail over any other version of personhood.

In Romania the arguments were about purposing cisfemale bodies for the benefit of the proletariat, within a larger context of understanding rights as always connected to needs of state and not to any definition of personal autonomy.

In Indiana, the arguments have been about the criminal nature of a medical procedure because a subgroup of evangelical Christians believe not only that a person begins to exist once a fertilized egg comes into being in a uterus, but also that such a belief vacates all other possible scientific or religious concepts of personhood.

The separation of church and state is, in fact, the underlying problem for these individuals. And that makes the SBI abortion ban in Indiana EVERYONE's problem, not just the problem of people with uteruses who are premenopausal.

The abortion ban solves no social problems that most of the electorate actually

understands as such. Forced births have consequences that Republican state legislators have been unwilling to name or confront: while the reproductive labor of women is normalized as necessary to support the growth of a fetus, child raising is relegated to the realm of private responsibility that the state needs to police but has no obligation to actually support.

The Republican legislative supermajority seems just as content with the duplicitous notion that the well-being of that newborn and their mother is no responsibility of the state. No testimony from those touting the personhood of a fetus (Republican legislators and evangelical testimonies from citizens) acknowledged that women need to work to pay for the cost of raising a child.

The Indiana legislature was silent on reproductive and caretaking work, under the assumption that both are the private responsibility of the mother, even as the state is to control the same private responsibility during pregnancy. No maternity leaves beyond the unpaid 90-day FMLA were contemplated by the legislature. No extra funds from the federal relief package for better pre- and neonatal care, despite Indiana's abominable rate of being third highest in the nation in maternal mortality rate. No support for daycare.

Women's Assigned Roles

Hidden in the silences of the new forced-birth bill are assumptions about women's function in society. Women as workers is not what frames how Republican legislators imagine pregnancy and parenting.

Even though hundreds of employers signed an open letter opposing SBI based on how it would affect women's participation in the workforce, the legislature was unimpressed with those concerns. So how are

women to take care of the rent, utilities, feed their kids, clothe them, and pay for medical bills?

There is another obvious hidden assumption here: that all women should be in heterosexual marriages where, just as in the 19th century version of white womanhood, they would be staying at home and raising kids, while their husbands would be out in the world working.

The absurdity of this scenario flies in the face of all facts about women's participation in the economy and trends in terms of marriage. More and more women are working fulltime, or even more than one job. Fewer people are getting married. More women are becoming economic heads of household, both as single parents and as a part of a couple.

These social trends have developed out of longer structural changes and have generated an enhanced quality of life for women overall. Education, the shift of the economy away from manufacturing and towards services, and contraceptive technologies have all facilitated women's higher levels of employment and away from the norms of family formation that featured the traditional male as breadwinner.

In fact, at this point the only category of persons who still overwhelmingly think that the nuclear family with the male breadwinner should be the social norm are married white men ages 39-65, who make up a minority of people living in the United States.

But this category also happens to be hugely over-represented in politics, and especially in the Republican supermajority of the Indiana legislature.

Escape from Indiana?

What will Indiana look like five years from now, if this legislation remains in force without any additional measures to mitigate the economic impact of the consequences I've mentioned above?

As an educator at the largest public university in Indiana, I can point towards some likely outcomes. The gender makeup of the undergraduate population is currently tilting towards more female students, and that trend will end. Only parents who cannot afford to send their daughters to Illinois or Michigan, meaning those with fewer economic means and likely less white, will continue to send them to institutions in Indiana.

The large numbers of out-of-state students at Indiana University, for instance, who have hailed especially from the east coast, Illinois and California, are likely to become less female. What sane parent would send their daughter to Indiana University, a party school, for four years of "college experience" when they could send her to a state where abortion is legal?

Graduate students, who have become

somewhat more diverse in terms of gender in the past 20 years, will likely become more cismale as prospective female graduate students seek states which respect women's reproductive rights. Moreover, some of the most promising candidates, whatever gender and other demographic they may be, will have an additional reason to choose another program in a state where all individuals enjoy the same rights.

Some programs may continue to thrive regardless of this trend. But medicine will not be one of them. The dire consequences of that trend are already visible.

Nursing and medical students have been on the frontlines of opposing SBI. A survey of the IU School of Medicine fourth year interns reveals that 85% of them intend to leave the state after graduation now that SBI has passed.

Indiana already has 27% of its counties designated as health care deserts. That percentage is likely to increase in the future.

Indiana University has made great efforts to recruit a more diverse faculty, but it has a dismal record of retaining them. The new legislation creates a structural problem that is particularly thorny for female faculty. Women ages 25-45, at the peak of their fertility years, will have to consider the advantages of employment at Indiana University against the possibility they will have to deal with unexpected/unwanted pregnancies.

Given the expectations of high academic productivity within a set number of years at the very beginning of that period as a condition for a longterm contract, the abortion ban generates added risks that one might not want to take, especially if other employment opportunities exist.

In short, we are likely to see a decrease in the number of female faculty in all programs. For those affected by the abortion

ban who do continue to work or study at Indiana University, added stress factors and thus mental health problems will be a likely outcome.

Without additional resources in that area, women will be forced to shoulder those problems either on their own or through informal networks of support, just as they had to shoulder the COVID crisis in the past two years as mothers of children who were participating in school activities from home.

The level of satisfaction among female faculty is already substantially lower than that of male faculty; without mitigating measures to counter the trend into the future, it will go down.

If the criminalization of abortion brought about no longterm positive results even in a country like Romania with institutional commitment to financially supporting the needs of women forced to shoulder the double day

of work, what is the criminalization of abortion without any state or employer support going to produce?

There is no reason to believe that everything will go on as it has until now. There is no reason to imagine that women will not vote with their feet and leave Indiana.

Female flight is a massive problem in the making that is not solely women's. It is a problem for schools. It is a problem for all employers. It is a problem for the healthcare industry. It is a problem for our society, writ large.

While the term "social justice" has somewhat fallen out of fashion, "social injustice" seems like a fitting term for what is happening in Indiana after the passage of SBI. Without a massive effort to call out legislators in the way that electorate turned out in Kansas, the current injustices will only grow and hurt our well-being as a society. ■

UAW Members Vote at Last By Dianne Feeley

FOR THE FIRST time in the history of the UAW, members will be able to vote for their top officers. A million members, including retirees, will receive mail-in ballots. Industrial workers represent 75% of the working members while nurses, state workers, graduate students and casino employees make up the rest.

Ballots went out at the end of October; results will be tabulated beginning November 29. Those receiving more than 50% of the vote win outright, others face a run-off.

Until the corruption of a dozen top officers was revealed through a government investigation, top positions were elected through a delegated convention that the Administration Caucus has dominated since 1947. The caucus maintained its control over the union through its carrot-and-stick approach, especially through the appointment of paid union positions. While there have been many challenges to the Administration Caucus and its increasing willingness to make concessions, most of those who dissented or supported militant action were outmaneuvered, blacklisted or crushed.

The struggle for one member, one vote was won through a 2021 membership referendum. This occurred because the Administration Caucus could not contain its stench of corruption. A dozen top officers had appropriated money from UAW funds to provide a lavish lifestyle for themselves. Two corporate executives have also been sentenced for deals they worked out with UAW officials. Additionally officials took at least \$1.9 million kickbacks from vendors.

Meanwhile the Unite All Workers for Democracy caucus had been campaigning to win the required number of locals that could change the constitution to electing top

officers through a membership vote. When the U.S. Justice Department appointed a federal monitor over the union, he instituted a referendum to determine this issue. The Administrative Caucus leadership kept fairly quiet about the referendum, perhaps suspecting it would pass and minimizing the number of voters by their silence.

Having advocated a "yes" vote on the referendum and playing an active role in raising critical issues at the recent convention, UAWD put together a UAW Members United slate of seven candidates. It is the only slate running against the Administration Caucus, dubbed the Curry slate after Ray Curry, who was installed as president by the UAW executive board following the arrest and resignation of Gary Jones in June 2021. The USWD slate is headed by Shawn Fain, an international representative who broke with the Administrative Caucus.

In addition to monitoring and reporting on the UAW leadership's transparency or lack thereof, the federal monitor set up the rules for the current election. These included a series of debates with labor writer Stephen Greenhouse as moderator as well as a special edition of *Solidarity* magazine. The 28-page magazine contained election rules and equal free space for the various candidates.

As a UAWD member, I have been leafletting various plants in the Detroit area and have gotten a good response from members, who are interested in an anti-concessions, anti-corruption slate. Whatever the vote, the task ahead is monumental: We need to end the system of tiers that cuts across the need to unify workers, and launch an effective organizing drive to recruit unorganized workers who will be attracted to a democratic and militant union. ■

Places where reproductive health services can be accessed legally and safely for people who need them in Indiana:

National Abortion Federation for both funding & finding a clinic (<https://prochoice.org>)

Hoosier Abortion Fund for funding and finding a clinic (<https://alloptionsprc.org/hoosier-abortion-fund/>)

Chicago Abortion Fund for funding (<https://www.chicagoabortionfund.org>)

All-Options Pregnancy Resource Center (<https://alloptionsprc.org>)

I Need An A for finding a clinic (<https://www.ineedana.com>)

Find Verified Abortion Care and Support for finding a clinic (<https://www.abortionfinder.org>)



Double stacked containers in rail yard behind Cincinnati Union Terminal.

David Brossard, CC BY SA 2.0

Are Railroad Workers at an Impasse? By Guy Miller

“The carriers maintain that capital investment and risk are the reasons for their profits, not any contributions by labor.”

—Management’s opening statement to the Presidential Emergency Board

AS THE CLOCK wound down to the September 16 impending strike of 12 railroad unions¹ (representing 140,000 workers), Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh entered the final marathon bargaining session. With hours to spare, negotiators signed a tentative agreement. President Joe Biden called it “a big win for labor.”

The fact that the U.S. union bureaucracy often functions as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Democratic Party, and given that this is an election year with the two parties of the bosses running neck and neck, the pressure was on to accept an inferior contract. After all, we can’t afford to embarrass Joe Biden in the November elections. But that was then, now it seems it is possible that railroad workers will turn the contract down. Their red-hot anger over having to be on call 24/7 continues to burn.

The tentative agreement allows for one

Guy Miller is a retired United Transportation Union member, long-time socialist and lifelong resident of Chicago. He thanks Robert Bartlett for his help.

paid sick day per year and permits workers to take unpaid days without being penalized by strict attendance policies. Although the companies saw these changes as concessions, workers across the 12 unions may feel this is a drop in the bucket compared to what they need and deserve.

At the beginning of the negotiations, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE) had pushed for 13 sick days. Getting one day may have seemed like a sick joke. On October 10 members turned the tentative agreement down by 56%.

Four unions have ratified the agreement while three others have also voted it down. Next up are the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET) for engineers and Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation (SMART) for conductors and trainmen.

These unions represent the operating crafts, similar to BMWE workers. All have stressed, repeatedly, that the major issue for them is not wages — although there have been no wage increases since 2019 — but quality of life issues.

If the tentative agreement is voted down, a strike could shut down the national rail system somewhere between November 19 and December 7 (safely after the elections). A strike before the elections is exactly what

Marty Walsh feared, and worked to prevent.

Recent History

In 2021, the seven class-one railroads² in the U.S. and Canada reported a combined income of \$27 billion, up from \$14 billion just 10 years earlier. Better than that, the gravy train runs on an express track down the middle of Wall Street.

Excluding the privately owned Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), the six publicly traded class carriers paid out \$186 billion in stock buy-backs and dividends to their shareholders over the last decade.

Those stunning figures have come at a high cost. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in two short years, November 2018 to December 2020 (notice the timing, just before the pandemic) the railroad industry lost 40,000 jobs. But the amount of freight traffic only grew during those years.

Ross Grooter, an engineer on the Union Pacific, and co-chair of Railroad Workers United, summed up the situation succinctly: “The job has just become fewer people, doing more work faster.”

In 2022, as the strike deadline drew closer, media war drums began beating to the tune of “supply chain crisis” and the inevitable “national emergency.” Hardly a

newspaper article or a television report failed to mention the impending doom that a national railroad strike would cause to the economy.

The irony of the supply-chain-crisis narrative is that the railroads and trucking industry have made it a reality. Decades of lean production have driven tens of thousands of experienced employees out of the transportation industry. The mania for “just in time” production means there is no margin for error when the inevitable rainy day finally arrives. Baby formula runs out in hours, paper towels disappear off the shelves in days, and auto plants are forced to shut down when needed parts are stuck in ships off the coast of Long Beach, California.

Now, in a textbook example of *chutzpah*, the carriers cry: supply chain crisis.

How Railroads Modernized

Beginning around 1950 and extending into the middle 1970s, U.S. industries began shoring up their profitability through various mechanisms such as privatization, deregulation and globalization. This era of neoliberalism gave rise to lean production and “just in time” supply chains.

But central to neoliberalism was beating back the defiant working class of the post-Vietnam War years. One third of workers were union members, strikes were more common and wage increases were the rule of the day. It would take ten years to turn the militant generation of Lordstown into the generation of the crushed PATCO air controllers strike.

Different industries presented different challenges to the downsizers. Some unions could be brought to heel suddenly, but in other industries it happened gradually. Railroads, partly because of their spread-out and relatively diffuse nature, would take a little longer.

By the early 1970s, I noticed firemen (essentially assistant engineers) disappearing from commuter trains. It wasn't much longer until cabooses on road trains went the way of milk in bottles. Switching crews went from four to three, and finally, to two. Once ubiquitous yard clerks were replaced by cameras, GPS began to track the cabs that shuttled crews between yards.

Even Warren Buffett, the seventh richest man on the planet, got in on the act through his Berkshire Hathaway company. The company plunked down a cool \$44 billion to buy the BNSF, the second largest railroad in the United States in 2009. By the time I retired later that year, the carriers were set to play hardball in earnest. The last, and perhaps most upsetting, was the arrival of remote-controlled switch engines in the yards. With remotes, instead of a hogger behind the throttle, there was a black control box hanging around your neck.

In the 13 years since I last “turned a wheel,” the seven class-one carriers have gone from dreaming of a “lean work force” to demanding an emaciated one.

Quality of Life

The primary quality of life issue is the brutal nature of being on call 24/7. Unless you've experienced a work life tethered to the next telephone call, it may be difficult to grasp how torturous the situation can be.

In the past, operating crews would go from point A to point B and then back to A. Today it can be from A to B to C before going back to A, leading to even more time away from home.

I was lucky. In my railroad career I only spent two years on the less onerous yard extra board. Still, until this day, I feel a jolt of anxiety whenever I hear a telephone ring.

Here's how a typical scenario of being on call might work: After two or more days away from home, you tie up (finish your assignment), which puts you on the bottom of the to-be-called list, and the vigil of waiting for your next call begins. Because of cutbacks and people leaving the industry due to exhaustion, the list is about one-third shorter than it used to be, which makes your vigil one-third shorter.

Added into the new reality is the wildly unpredictable Precision Scheduling Railroad-ing (PSR). (I will discuss PSR later, but for now, just know there is nothing “precise” about its effect on your schedule.)

The traditional American fulltime job is based on the five-day work week, usually with Saturdays and Sundays off. This provides, at least, 104 days off built into the system. Either paid or unpaid, eight holidays can often be counted on. Many jobs provide vacations; with 15 years seniority three weeks is the norm.

Five sick days are not uncommon, especially in a unionized workplace. That comes to 138 free days, not extraordinary. It's fewer days off than a medieval peasant had, but it does provide a chance to structure a balanced life. A comparable freight engineer or conductor may have the three weeks' vacation — 21 days, full stop.

It gets worse. This past February, the BNSF instituted a new attendance policy called “Hi-Viz” (for high visibility). The patronizing name is only the beginning of its faults. The system “awards” each employee 30 attendance points, more or less for life.

Any absence, for any reason, results in losing points. An out-of-town wedding for two days might cost you 10 points, a last-minute flooded basement is perhaps good for six more, mark off with a head cold or a child's birthday and within six months you're in dangerous territory.

When the 30 points are exhausted, you are subject to your first round of discipline: 10 days off without pay. After that, the clock starts again, this time with only 15 points. Use those up and you're knocking at the door of dismissal. At some point, it becomes easier to skip a funeral here, or go to work sick there.

One engineer puts it this way in the online magazine *Motherboard*: “Hi Viz turns your life into a scoreboard. And you have no way, whatsoever, of knowing what that scoreboard is going to say.”

BNSF knew the anger their drastic new system would generate, and filed a preemptive suit in a Texas district federal court. The suit sought to block unions from taking any action, including picketing, work stoppages, and slowdowns.

The judge took the side of the company, ruling that the Hi Viz dispute fell under the category of “minor” under the provisions of the Railway Labor Act. Therefore unions had no recourse to action when it came to the BNSF's new attendance policy.

Although mostly behind the scenes, the non-operating crafts have also taken a beating during the last several decades. For example, Maintenance of Way (aka track workers, organized in the BMWWE) have had their work territory expanded to the point where they are expected to “commute” as far as a thousand miles from home.

Travel allowances and meal stipends are based on a 1990 agreement which forced BMWWE members to sleep in their cars after their work period ends. Their condition was so egregious that even the Presidential Emergency Board was forced to make an exception and rule on this Quality of Life issue.



Precision Scheduling Railroad-ing

Added to the barbaric attendance policy, another cause of the white-hot anger among railroaders is the train makeup system, dubbed “Precision Scheduling Railroad-ing” (PSR). Together with draconian work schedules, this past July, these two factors resulted in an astonishing 99.5% strike authorization vote by 24,000 BLET engineers. The stage was set for a September showdown.

Precision Scheduling Railroad-ing, a misnomer of Orwellian proportions, is not some master plan that would move freight more efficiently, but rather is in essence a sleazy business strategy. It is one of those rare ideas that manage to piss off both employees and customers.

At one time, the railroads placed a high priority of blocking cars in their over-the-road trains. Through the use of classification, or hump yards, trains were built up carefully to deliver specific freight to specific destinations. Train makeup emphasized the quality

of a train's manifest: auto racks lined up for a GM plant, double stacks for intermodal facilities, grain cars for agricultural centers.

With the advent of PSR, it's now all about assembling the biggest trains in the shortest amount of time. PSR has resulted in shuttering hump yards, mothballing engines, downgrading intermodal yards and chronic understaffing.

The magazine *Freight Ways* points to a 25% increase in average train length. By most accounts, this is an understatement. It's not unusual for carriers to glom two standard trains together, creating monsters of two-and-a-half to three miles long.

There's no time for blocking, no time for proper inspection. The only concern is how fast these behemoths can, as the railroad saying goes, "get out of Dodge."

The pressure PSR creates extends beyond the operating department. One example is the important job of signal maintainer, the men and women who keep the essential signals along the right of way working properly. Due to cutbacks, maintainers are forced to cover a bigger area. Before they can begin work they must get permission from a dispatcher.

The dispatchers, also under pressure, are reluctant to take a stretch of track out of service for the time needed to properly work on signals. As a result, it becomes tempting for the maintainers to do a less-than-thorough inspection.

Before a train leaves a terminal, car inspectors need to look over every car in the outbound trains. They are checking for broken brake pipes, open plugged doors, malfunctioning coupling devices, ladders, crosswalks, air hoses and anything else that could cause a calamity at 50 miles an hour. Inspectors used to take three minutes to check both sides of a car, now they are told to take one minute.

Profits Are the Bottom Line

In an October 2021 statement, the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO wrote about Precision Scheduling Railroad:

"PSR works for the few wealthy investors, who have little concern for anything other than their bottom lines.

"These investors are fickle, and when they have extracted every last cent out of the railroad industry, they will move to the next sector.

Meanwhile we will be left with a hollowed out system that does not serve the customer, has abandoned safety, and has pushed out thousands of skilled workers, who will never return."

The railroad bosses have two lists stuffed in the vest pockets of their suits. One is a wish list, and the other is a hit list. At the top of both lists is reducing all crews to one employee on freight trains. Think about it: one person, three miles of train, with dozens of cars of hazardous material, rumbling past your house at two AM.

The one-person crew didn't work out so well for the people of Lac Megantic, Quebec on July 6, 2013. An overworked engineer, forced to do conductor's work, allegedly failed to tie "sufficient" hand brakes on a train he had just brought over the road, with 72 tank cars carrying high-volatility crude oil. The result was 47 deaths when the brakes failed and the train rolled down a hill, derailed at high speed and exploded, incinerating the town center.

Ron Kaminkow, General Secretary, Railroad Workers United,³ poses a series of questions:

"What if the engineer has a heart attack? How will the train make a backup move? What happens when the train hits a vehicle or pedestrian? How will a single train crew member deal with 'bad order' equipment in his or her train? Or set out or pick up cars en route? What about calling signals? What about copying mandatory directives and reminders of slow orders?"

I would add: What about if an overworked engineer falls asleep? It's been known to happen. Who will cut road crossings if the train is stalled and emergency vehicles need to cross through?

Time magazine reports a growing schism between some highly placed members of railroad management, including a few CEOs, and Wall Street investors.

Some in management, with at least a modicum of on-the-ground savvy, realize that an investment in infrastructure (tracks, engines etc.), will pay off in long-term market share. Meanwhile, the Wall Street boys are obsessed with short-term profits, their strategy is "take the money and run."

Pete Swan, a professor of logistics and operation management at Penn State, told CNN: "Railroad Management has been focused on maximizing payouts to the shareholders and their return on assets, not the quality of service."

No matter the long-range thinking, Wall Street and management are united on one

thing: it's all about the profits.

Long Path to a Contract

More than two years of negotiations, the railroad workers in all 12 unions felt they were out of options and voted to strike. At this point the Railway Labor Act (RLA) of 1926 was set into motion. The RLA includes a convoluted set of stages, including 60-day cooling-off periods, a Presidential Emergency Board,⁴ arbitrary distinctions between major and minor grievances, and ultimately a determination to be made by Congress whether a work stoppage constitutes a "national emergency." Spoiler alert: It almost always does.

For the first time in memory, all 12 unions attempted to bargain in a coalition as opposed to separately. In the past, carriers would work out a deal with a union and then use it to set a pattern for the other settlements. Then when the Presidential Emergency Board released its findings, the coalition essentially fractured and unions started making tentative agreements based on the PEB findings. Part of their agreements had "me too" clauses in case some other unions got a better deal. Pretty despicable!

During the last national strike in 1991, Congress voted 400 to 5 to send us back to work after 23 hours. Five — that was the number of friends we had in Congress. In 1950 Harry Truman, another of our "friends," issued an executive order putting the country's railroads under the control of the U.S. Army.

This convoluted process is the mechanism to cool down workers' anger. Yet this time around, union members threaded their way through the labyrinth. They were within hours of a strike.

No matter how the current contract is finally resolved, the strike threat has put the companies on notice. The right to a schedule is not just an issue for the nation's railroad workers but also for those working in Amazon warehouses and at the corner Starbucks. Working people have the right to a life and the responsibility to take the future into their own hands. ■

Notes

1. The 12 unions on American railroads are organized on a craft basis. This arrangement is one of the legacies of the crushing of the historic Pullman Strike of 1894. Three of these are much larger than the others.
2. Class-One Railroads are determined by annual revenue. The seven that made the cut are: BLSF Railway Co., Canadian National Railway, Canadian Pacific, CSX Transportation, Kansas City Southern Railway Co., Norfolk Southern, and the Union Pacific Railroad.
3. Railroad Workers United is a rank-and-file cross craft reform movement of railroad workers.
4. The Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) The Railway Labor Act allows the president to appoint an emergency board. The creation of the emergency board delays a strike, or lockout, for sixty days, and makes recommendations for the settlement of the dispute.



Depositors protest at Zhengzhou Peoples Bank of China.

Weibo

Ponzi Scam with Chinese Characteristics: The Henan Rural Banks' Scandal

By Au Loong-yu

IN MID-APRIL 2022, four rural banks in Henan Province refused to allow depositors to withdraw their money. This situation was related to how China's real estate bubble burst, with ominous economic effects rippling throughout people's lives.

Four hundred thousand depositors have been affected, involving assets of 40 billion RMB (\$6 billion US). Depositors staged protests, but as hundreds gathered in front of the central bank in Zhengzhou, they were attacked by unidentified persons. The violence produced an immediate backlash, and the rural banks quickly announced that they would reimburse "most" of the depositors.

Quite a number of *Wanghong* (online key opinion leaders) criticized the announcement for containing hidden clauses that might exclude some from recovering their savings. The banks might only pay those they defined "depositors" but not "investors," who signed documents called "wealth investment products."

Is this a Ponzi scandal with Chinese characteristics? Have banks loaned recent customers money, at high-interest rates, taken from depositors' funds? The July 11, 2022 *Bloomberg News* called it the country's "largest bank scandal."

The online media platform ifeng.com identified the man behind the scandal as

Au Loong-yu is the author of Hong Kong in Revolt. The Protest Movement and the Future of China (Pluto Press). The main content of this article has been first published in a German edition: <https://blogs.taz.de/china-watch/der-skandal-um-die-laendlichen-banken-in-henan/>. This English version is slightly expanded.

Lüyi, boss of the Xincifu Group Investment Holding Co. The Xincifu Group colluded with the banks' managers to cheat the depositors' savings before fleeing the country. Further, ifeng also revealed that Lüyi's generous backer was the HNA Group Co., Ltd.

The story does not end here. HNA, a former state-owned enterprise, grew from an original \$10 million in startup assets (1993) to a trillion-dollar empire in 2016. Its mysterious growth seems to be related to family ties with Wang Qishan, the current vice-President of China and former head of Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign, and the Xi Jinping family.

The ifeng.com report was soon erased but its re-posting outside China can still be found. (See <https://www.bannedbook.org/bnews/zh-tw/baitai/20220711/1756580.html>)

Public Scrutiny Failed

The ifeng.com report mentioned that Lüyi had deep connections with the top management of not just four rural banks, but at least 26. This enabled him to easy and cheap money while buying up shares.

Rural banks have only been in existence a dozen years. They are under the jurisdiction of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. CBIRC allows private shareholders as long as the founding member is an established commercial bank holding at least 15% of the shares. But this check on private shareholders did not prevent a serious scandal.

Coming just three years after Xi Jinping announced that his country has won an "overwhelming victory" against corruption,

the Henan scandal reveals that scamming still exists and local government is an accomplice.

In fact, the local government made use of the Covid monitoring system to track down the depositors-protesters and keep them isolated at home. Then when they dared to protest, the police stand by as unidentified thugs beat up protesters. These circumstances suggest that the local governments assist corrupt banks, not the people.

Alliance with Developers & Thugs

This is nothing new. Local governments have long been in collusion with developers and local gangsters. They supply the developers with easy credit and have them purchase land from the owners, then use the gangsters to beat up residents who refuse to be removed from their homes.

All these parties make big money at the expenses of the people and the state. Meanwhile the local government's debt to GDP ratio has risen 7.6-fold in the last 30 years — in December 1993 it was 3.6%, by March 2010 it was 16.2%, by March 2022 it stood at 27.5%. But official figures are notoriously unreliable.

Last year Goldman Sachs economists estimated China's hidden local government debt had swelled to more than half the total economy. The *Bloomberg News* reported, "China has nearly 4,000 small and medium-sized lenders that collectively control almost \$14 trillion in assets. But confidence in these banks has waned since 2019, when the government seized a lender for the first time since 1998 and imposed losses on some creditors."

continued on page 15

Rejection of the New Constitution: Chile: Analysis of a Defeat

By Oscar Mendoza

ON SEPTEMBER 4, 2022 Chileans voted decisively and by a large margin to reject the proposed new progressive constitution. The document had been drafted by a constitutional convention that worked over 12 months to deliver its proposals. The draft would have replaced the current one, which had been written by a small group of extreme right-wing “experts” and imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship via a fraudulent plebiscite in 1980.

In 2020 the plebiscite to decide on choosing a fully-elected constitutional convention charged with drafting a new constitution won a huge majority. Representatives opposing a new constitution secured less than a third of the vote, thus preventing them from vetoing any proposals.

At first glance, it is difficult if not impossible to understand not only the triumph of the rejection camp but its massive margin of victory (68% rejection versus 32% approval). This article offers an analysis of the historic defeat for progressive forces in Chile.

Many structural causes have been discussed, along with contingent ones associated with the Covid pandemic and the inflationary crisis. The new constitution would have placed the role of the state front and center, creating guarantees for key social and economic rights.

The outcome has therefore been painful for its supporters. Particularly for this reason we have a duty to understand the rejection.

Changing Context

The erroneous reading of the context in which the convention took place and of the challenges faced by ordinary Chileans during the period, led both members of the convention and political forces outside to fail to take account of changes that had occurred since the social explosion and political compromise of late 2019 that created the basis for developing a new constitution.

As a result, they were unable to anticipate what they were about to come up against.

Early 2020 saw the onset of the Covid

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Jose Miguel Cordero Carvacho/Wikimedia

Chile's hopes in 2019 for a new progressive constitution have suffered a setback.

pandemic across the globe, resulting in massive changes in every sphere of life. Lockdowns and associated restrictions put an end to rallies and campaigns, except those occurring under very special circumstances.

Those sectors of the population that potentially had most to gain from political action became more atomized and inward looking. They suffered the worst effects of the pandemic in terms of employment, earnings and quality of life. The order of the day was to put food on the table and pay the bills. Heaven could wait!

Meanwhile the brutal repression by the Piñera government, whether in response to peaceful or violent protests, was widely condemned by a range of human rights organizations starting with the UN. The accompanying breakdown in public order caused concern among large numbers of Chileans who don't normally participate in politics.

Already anxious about the future and battered by the pandemic, they witnessed how the cost of living crisis unleashed by the Russian invasion of the Ukraine in February 2022 made things worse.

They also faced continuing high levels of violent crime (armed robberies, carjackings), especially in the capital, Santiago. In addition, the effects of mass illegal immigration from

other Latin American countries, which particularly affected the North of the country, and violent conflict in the Indigenous Mapuche areas in the South, added to the general climate of instability and uncertainty that fuelled the rejection campaign.

The left, or we might say center-left Boric government came to power only in March 2022. Nevertheless sections of the population, encouraged by a relentless media campaign to undermine the administration at every turn, began to blame the new president and his largely inexperienced cabinet for many of these problems.

People's needs were so urgent that the limited progress Boric was able to achieve in his six months in office only served to further inflame the opposition. It too became an element of the rejection vote.

Dynamics of the Convention

Within the constitutional convention, about a third were a mainly independent mix of identity-based groups (Indigenous peoples, feminists, environmentalists, sexual minorities). They had been most active during the social unrest of October 2019.

Their demands had been ignored for decades and when they came to the convention they were full of anger and frustration.

They had minimal — if any — disposition to dialogue and compromise.

A slightly larger proportion represented people aligned with political forces in support of change; however, without direct party allegiance they couldn't be influenced to adopt this or that position.

A smaller minority quickly showed that its main role in the convention would be one of obstruction and opposition, placing itself firmly in the rejection camp.

There was no real effort to build internal alliances and generate a consensus. Therefore the work of the convention was often like trying to control a “sack of cats,” to use a Chilean expression.

For their part, the political parties in support of change and the Boric government supported the approval option, but were preoccupied with implementing the platform of the new government. They failed to provide the leadership required for a successful yes vote. The parties were unsure and uncertain as to how influence the October plebiscite, particularly when voters had not elected them to the convention.

They were also fearful of being accused of “interventionism” by the right. This variety of viewpoints within parties and the new government resulted in a lack of unity and even discord.

This lack of leadership was compounded within the working of the convention itself and the behavior of some of its members. Initial weeks were taken up, and to the dismay of the general public, with countless rounds of voting to determine the convention leadership and membership for its various thematic strands. From that moment, the convention seemed to disappear into its own bubble, growingly distant from public sentiment in the country at large.

The symbolic election of a Mapuche woman and Indigenous rights activist as the first president of the convention could in hindsight be considered an error. Regardless of her evident personal abilities and qualifications, this act appeared to large sections of the population as “favoring” minority viewpoints over the interests of the majority.

Convention members seemed to believe that when voters were asked to approve or reject the proposed new constitution, it was a mere formality. Given that large majorities had voted for change, it's understandable that members assumed their perspective represented most of the country. They didn't feel the need to consider other viewpoints, whether inside the convention or outside.

To make matters worse, some individual convention members undermined its overall credibility with the public by unacceptable behavior. For example, Giovanna Grandón, aka Tía Pikachu, representing the independent People's List, went about dressed up as the Pokémon character from which she

takes her nickname. Chileans don't lack a sense of humor but most demand different standards from their representatives.

Rodrigo Rojas Vade, also from the People's List, was chosen as one of the convention vice-presidents during its first phase. But he'd fraudulently claimed to be suffering from cancer in order to elicit sympathy; his unmasking caused untold damage to a convention already much criticized.

Other convention members created controversy by apparent disregard for other viewpoints. Especially troubling was aggressive and intemperate language not only in speeches but in public pronouncements.

The sum of these failings fed a torrent of mainstream media stories and a strong anti-convention narrative. By the end of 2021, the rejection campaign already had the upper hand. Garnering large financial support, it became an unstoppable rollercoaster.

Another key element, in my view, was that the output from the convention — variously referred to as “maximalist,” diffuse, or an endless “wish list” — was so far from the substantial but gradual change that a majority of Chileans expected. Even those wholly in favor of change became uncertain at first and later opposed the proposals.

Many political figures, analysts and commentators (influencers, if you like) who supported the drafting of a new constitution, steadily became critical of the convention and its product. Eventually they publicly joined the rejection camp. Others, such as ex-president Ricardo Lagos — the entrepreneurs' favorite — raised significant objections and in a sort of veiled way placed himself outside the approval camp.

The 2022 proposed constitution had 388 articles, having been whittled down from almost 500 by the convention's harmonization committee! By comparison, the Pinochet-imposed 1980 constitution had 120 articles,

Given the scale of the rejection, I don't believe we can gain much by examining all the constitution's positive provisions. However, it would be fair to say that it would have become the most progressive and advanced founding document on the planet, eclipsing those of much more developed and advanced countries.

It's as if convention members wanted us to go from a hugely restrictive, reactionary and oppressive constitution to the most progressive in one fell swoop.

Aftermath of the Rejection

It cannot be ignored, though its significance I believe has been a bit overstated, that the political, economic and social forces behind the rejection option conducted a huge public opinion campaign by misrepresenting, exaggerating and plain lying about the proposals. They were able to build up a sense that the convention's work failed to

deliver what Chileans wanted and expected.

Having control of most of the mass media and a well-resourced and skilled social media onslaught gave the rejection camp a significant and ultimately telling advantage.

While the approval option developed its proposals and began its mass outreach campaign, the rejection option started campaigning almost from the convention's inception. Its message was simple: Reject!

The large and diffuse nature of the new constitution's proposals made it difficult for supporters to develop a simple and coherent narrative. Once the climate of public opinion formed that the convention had failed, there was no going back.

Since the decisive rejection of the plebiscite, some analysts and activists on the left have expressed the view that Chileans voted out of ignorance and against their own interests as a result of the campaign of lies and misinformation. Fake news did it, they argue.

While I believe this played an undeniable part in creating the climate of opinion that led to the rejection vote, I think it is an error to say that. As we get more data and breakdowns of the result by demographics, geography and so on, it becomes clearer that it was the combination of many factors, to a differing degree depending on the individual voters.

In spite of a government campaign to facilitate access to the text and to encourage “informed voting,” probably only a tiny minority of those Chileans most closely and actively involved in politics read the new constitution's proposals. Most went by the perception, created over almost two years of campaigning against change by the rich and powerful, additionally aided and abetted by influential foreign media outlets.

A Summary and Next Step

Perhaps one of the most important factors behind the rejection vote was that unlike all recent elections since January 2012, the September 4th plebiscite required mandatory voting for all registered persons. This meant that almost 86% of the over 15 million registered voters took part.

Compared to the vote on the process for drafting a new constitution, where only half of registered voters expressed a preference, more than five million more participated. In fact, more voters chose to reject than the total of voters in the 2020 plebiscite.

This large universe of “new” voters came mainly from sectors of the population usually unengaged in politics. They came from all regions of the country and from all socio-economic sectors. They could be described as independent, moderate and pragmatic in outlook and relatively nonpolitical. A large majority voted to reject.

It's possible that being forced to vote by

the harsh — for most — financial penalties involved in not casting their vote, they expressed a rejection of politics in general. They might have seen the constitutional process as unrepresentative of their lived experiences, of a government and political institutions that don't provide remedies to their ongoing plight. The new constitution may have represented for them a "jump into the unknown," a step too far.

In summary, I believe that Chilean voters had many and varied reasons for rejecting the new constitution.

A large majority simply didn't have confidence that the new founding document would provide the basis for the social, economic, cultural and political changes needed. They balked at the radical nature of many of the proposals; they were utterly confused by the sheer number of articles and what they meant for their lives and well being.

Are the long-term efforts at reform and change dead? Not for one minute, I think.

President Boric, in accepting the result of the vote, a highly damaging outcome for him personally and for his government, stated clearly that the process to develop a new constitution would continue. He pledged

that his government would play a facilitating role, encouraging and supporting dialogue to make that possible.

Interestingly, having campaigned to reject, Chile Vamos, the largest coalition on the right, remains committed to a new constitution. In spite of their internal differences, failing to go through with their commitment would in all likelihood prove costly in political and electoral terms.

Nonetheless, first steps have not been positive. On the eve of a reconvened meeting of political and congressional leaders tasked with discussing the way forward, Chile Vamos issued a statement declaring "red lines" in key areas. These included "right to life"/anti-abortion, private education, health and pension benefits and private ownership of water resources. Time will tell whether this stance, which would put an end to meaningful change, can hold.

In congress, both the presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate have pledged their support to a new process and are actively working to achieve consensus among the different political blocks.

It's ironic that those same political actors

rejected by the voters in 2020 are now the only realistic hope of securing the desired change. Leading political figures have spoken of the absolute need to have a new constitution in place before the 50th anniversary of the *coup d'état* in September 2023.

From an economic point of view, the climate of uncertainty is an obstacle to the much needed tax reform and internal investment that would provide the funds required to pay for reforms in education, health, pensions, social care and environmental protections that most Chileans demand.

Though the economy has recovered well from the pandemic, a fact highlighted by the OECD, the continuing political uncertainty works against that positive trend. The very high value of the U.S. dollar across the globe also further damages Chile's performance.

I, for one, agree with our departed comrade president, Salvador Allende, in saying that I have faith in Chile and its destiny.

Change will come. It has taken far too long and it might not be everything we wished and hoped for, but it will come and the future of our country will undoubtedly be brighter. ■

The Henan Rural Banks' Scandal — *continued from page 12*

A bank run will shake up the economy. We are not there yet, but the potential risks may explain why higher authorities have intervened to roll out a compensation plan for depositors. The CBIRC also told banks to bail out struggling property developers so they can complete unfinished housing projects. It could head off the growing mortgage strikes that threaten both the economy and the social order.

While government agencies confidently predict that Beijing has the will to repair the rupture, this may result in taking over projects from heavily indebted private companies, and in turn result in industry consolidation. The CBIRC has already signaled it will strengthen its coordination in order to "guarantee the delivery of homes." (See "China banks told to bail out property developers as mortgage boycotts threaten economy," by Martin Farrar, *The Guardian*, 7/18/22)

Omnipotent Bureaucracy & Its Greed

It is widely known that control of the industries that are the commanding heights of the country is divided up among the second (or third) red generation or high-level officials and their children — and in that order as well.

This "political class" is simultaneously an economically exploiting class, who would not be content with their official salaries. Corruption provides their incentive to work as "public servants." And this boundless

appetite for money and power has become an unbearable burden for both the Chinese people and a healthy economy.

Additionally, the power struggle at the top is another destabilizing factor. If *ifeng.com* can dare to mention that Wang Qishan is connected to the HNA Group, the media bosses might have a political reason for allowing this to be reported.

What is clear is that the party has disfranchised people to the point of largely privatizing the state to its own benefit. And this is the main source of the social and economic chaos we are now facing.

The strict state control over the economy has led some to claim that China is not going to crash because of its debt problem. We are told that "the government can order the big four banks to exchange defaulted loans for equity stakes and forget them." (See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2022/07/21/is-china-headed-for-a-crash/>)

Technically that's true, *if* all the data were somehow reliable, and more importantly *if* we confine our analysis to strictly economic arguments and forget about politics. But we simply cannot assume official figures are correct. Nor should we confine our analysis to strictly economic arguments.

The party-state has encouraged people to believe that the state will guarantee their economic wellbeing *if* they agree to give up all political rights. And since the crackdown on the 1989 democratic movement, with the

encouragement from the party state, Chinese people appear to be merely economic animals who take no interest in questioning the way the party is leading the country.

But as high growth rates come to an end and coincide with an even more corrupt, hence increasingly malfunctioning bureaucracy, we should examine the economic situation against the background of this growing political crisis.

As we see significant capital flight, as homebuyers refuse to pay mortgages on unfinished homes, and as we see widespread support for "lying flat" (a passive boycott of the party's policies in general), people are asserting their dissident perspectives *en masse* for the first time since 1989, even if very rudimentary and individually.

We should not forget that it was the same kind of nationwide passive boycott, go-slow and work-to-rule among workers and peasants since the fall of Lin Biao in 1971 that paved the way of the complete turn-around in the party's "Cultural Revolution" policy after the death of Mao. Today a comparable sentiment is now beginning to spring up everywhere.

Many no longer believe the party's promise and some are increasingly enraged by the insane level of lockdown over the Covid pandemic. It is hard to predict the future, but to imagine that the future of China just depends on its economic performance is a typical example of "economism." ■

Disempower Fossil Capital — Support Ukrainian Resistance

By European Leftists

THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT is taken from a statement by Ukrainian and other European leftists. The full text, with endnotes, is posted at <https://againstthecurrent.org/support-ukrainian-resistance-and-disempower-fossil-capital/>. The signers are Ilya Budraitskis, Oksana Dutchak, Harald Eitzbach, Bernd Gehrke, Eva Gelinsky, Renate Hürtgen, Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski, Natalia Lomonosova, Hanna Perekhoda, Denys Pilash, Zakhar Popovych, Philipp Schmid, Christoph Wälz, Przemyslaw Wielgosz and Christian Zeller.

THE KREMLIN WANTS to prevent any independent development of Ukraine. The Putin leadership considers Ukraine, together with Belarus, to be part of Russia. Ukraine's independence contradicts Russia's alleged historical claims.

The Russian leadership has not reacted to one or another of NATO's moves; rather, it is pursuing fundamental goals with its war, which it justifies with its Great Russian ideology. Putin and exponents of his regime have repeatedly placed themselves in the historical continuity of the tsarist empire, thereby excluding the existence of an independent Ukrainian national culture and identity.

In June, Putin placed the war of conquest against Ukraine on a par with the Great Northern War under Russia's Tsar Peter I, speaking simply of a reclaiming of Russian soil. Thus, the goals of the Russian leadership are fundamental and far-reaching and go far beyond repelling NATO: destroying Ukraine as an independent country and incorporating it as "Little Russia."

The war practice coincides with the war goal. Towns and villages are systematically destroyed, the population terrorized and expelled. In the occupied territories, the Russian state establishes a regime of terror, incorporates the schools into the Russian school system, allows only Russian media and imposes the ruble as a means of payment.

By June 20, Russia had brought over 1.9 million Ukrainians to Russia, including 300,000 children. Thousands of Ukrainians are holding out in camps in eastern Siberia, far from Ukraine.

Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invading forces, surprising both to the U.S.

and European governments and to the Putin regime, prevented a rapid occupation of the country and the installation of a puppet pro-Russian government.

It was this popular resistance in Ukraine that presented all actors with a new situation. The Ukrainian oligarchs had to get behind the resistance and against Russia. The governments of Europe and the United States had to correct their assessment that Ukraine would quickly collapse. Putin was forced to adapt his war strategy to the new situation.

Putin and the Far Right

At the same time, the Putin regime links the war with a "struggle for values" against the decadent West. It wants to push back democratic rights, achievements of the workers', women's and homosexual movements, not only in Russia but also in the areas under its influence.

Russia funds and promotes far-right parties throughout Europe and the world. The Putin regime is the admired spearhead of a reactionary to fascist movement with Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marine Le Pen in France, and the AfD in Germany.

It was the determined and self-sacrificing resistance of the Ukrainian people against the occupying forces that confronted the NATO countries with the question of comprehensive arms deliveries. Immediately after the war began, the U.S. and U.K. governments advised Ukrainian President Zelensky to leave the country and offered him protection.

Like the leadership in the Kremlin, they expected Ukraine to be defeated quickly. They were all mistaken in the Ukrainian people's will to resist. They assumed that after a wave of outrage and economic sanctions, European and U.S. corporations would return to normal business with Russia.

The tenacious resistance of Ukraine and the military difficulties of the Russian occupation forces opened the opportunity for the governments of NATO countries to weaken Russia's military and geopolitical position through massive arms deliveries to Ukraine. Thus, the fighting people in Ukraine are not the executors of an imperialist plan, but they are fighting for their legitimate goals and rights in Ukrainian society, fighting for

their existence as Ukrainians.

Until the outbreak of war, there can be no talk of NATO arming Ukraine. Ukraine received \$4 billion in military aid from the United States from 2014 to 2022. Since at least 2015, the U.S. Army also trained Ukrainian troops, albeit on a relatively small scale. But much of the military assistance flowed after the war began.

From 2014 to 2021, direct military assistance amounted to \$2.4 billion. German arms exports to Ukraine have been relatively small to date; German arms exports to Russia have been disproportionately larger since 2014 — despite the embargo — and even into the period immediately before the war began.

The governments of Europe and the United States share responsibility for the escalation of geopolitical tensions, but not because of the alleged NATO encirclement of Russia that Russian propaganda painted on the wall and that many on the left in Europe adopted quite cheaply.

It is forgotten that the expansion of NATO with the accession of Russia's neighboring countries was essentially completed by 2004, and above all that numerous countries in Eastern Europe sought NATO membership not out of a desire for military rearmament, but out of fear of a strengthening Russian revanchism.

The real co-responsibility of the NATO countries for the aggravation of the contradictions lies in their economic interest in the former Soviet republics.

Capital in the imperialist countries of Europe and North America was not only looking for new NATO members, but primarily wanted to open up further markets and obtain cheap raw materials. For this, it needed governments that could organize the process of social transformation in an orderly manner and, if necessary, by force.

The Western imperialist powers, first and foremost the United States and Great Britain, recognized in Ukraine's initially successful resistance to Russian occupation forces the opportunity to substantially weaken Russia's geopolitical position by strengthening Ukraine's military capabilities....

At the same time, it is obvious that key countries in Europe, including Germany and



In support of Ukraine: Razem ("Together") is a party of the Polish left.

France, but also Austria and Switzerland, are giving Ukraine only limited support. They are seeking an understanding with the Russian oligarchy. Neither do they really supply the necessary weapons, nor do they relieve the bled-out Ukrainian society with a cancellation of debts.

Major factions of capital in Europe, especially those linked to the fossil industries (Germany, Austria) and to the international commodity trade (Switzerland), have been doing highly profitable business with the Putin oligarchs for years. They would like to quickly return to normality and resume these businesses. Russia is a much more important market for Western European capital than Ukraine.

The Character of the War

Ukraine is not an imperialist country, nor did it threaten to attack other countries. Rather, Ukraine is a young country whose independence and own nation-building Russia does not accept and therefore has been attacking militarily since 2014. However, the Putin regime wants to integrate Ukraine once again as an internal colony into a Greater Russian Empire, as was the case under the tsars.

Thus, the Ukrainian population is not waging a NATO "proxy war" against Russia, but is fighting for its own independence and for democratic and social rights, all of which it would lose under Russian occupation. The situation in the so-called People's Republics in the Donbas is threat enough as a likely prospect under an occupation regime.

Of course, the war can be understood

only in the context of international rivalry between the major imperialist powers. The U.S. and NATO countries, with their rearmament offensive launched even before the Russian attack on Ukraine, are preparing for possible military conflicts with China and the intensified struggle for raw materials and ecological sinks.

Therefore, it is obvious that the U.S. and the European powers want to use the war in Ukraine strategically for their goals. As long as Ukraine's resistance meets their goals, they will engage, but of course not unconditionally. Different capital factions of Western imperialisms even see themselves hindered by the war from serving markets in Russia. Moreover, neither the U.S. nor the European countries are belligerents. If they were, we would indeed have a world war.

Characteristic of the current phase of the war is that there is a temporary and partial alignment of interests between Ukraine and imperialist powers. In a similar situation of temporary alignment of interests, the People's Defense Forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces in northern Syria have had massive support in their fight against the Islamic State from U.S. air power, without which they would have lost the battle.

We are seeing right now, in the face of increased Turkish attacks, that this protection does not last. These days, the leadership of the PYD, the strongest party in northeastern Syria, is demanding a no-fly zone from NATO, paradoxically against the NATO country Turkey. This is of course no reason to distance ourselves from the resistance in Rojava, but on the contrary is a reason to

strengthen solidarity.

From our analysis we conclude that Ukraine has the right to obtain weapons wherever it gets them. The U.S. and European governments are supplying arms to a well-dosed extent, but for their own motives.

Conclusions

We advocate the dissolution of NATO and the Russian-dominated military alliance CSTO. Instead, we are in favor of building a democratic and collective security system. The arms industry in the West and East must be continuously dismantled and converted into socially useful and ecologically compatible industries.

We support the climate movement's call for an exit from Russian oil and gas as a step toward a complete phase-out of fossil fuels... (W)e want to build a movement for social appropriation and for the ecological conversion and dismantling of the large fossil corporations together with the climate movement and grassroots trade union initiatives. This is the prerequisite for getting out of fossil fuels.

Those who now tolerate a Russian victory also tolerate a victory for both global and "domestic" fossil and commodity-based capital, which is closely intertwined with the Russian fossil and extractive sectors. Therefore, a new anti-militarist movement must uphold solidarity with the civil as well as armed resistance of the Ukrainian people, and with the Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian leftists who oppose Putin regime's war. ■

Natural and Man-Made Disasters: Hurricanes and Neoliberal Ravages

By César J. Ayala

PUERTO RICO WAS hit by two hurricanes in the last five years, both in the month of September.

- The first blow was María in 2017, a category 5 hurricane which devastated the island's electrical grid and left some sectors of the population without electricity for up to a year.
- In September 2022 Hurricane Fiona struck. This time it was a category 1 hurricane, with winds not as strong as María's but with more rain, producing floods, mudslides and destruction of bridges.

Before discussing these two events of nature, it is necessary to frame them in the context of another set of catastrophic events of the 21st century in Puerto Rico, which were entirely man-made.

Humans indeed have a part in the current climate changes which have generated fires, floods and stronger storms throughout the planet. But catastrophic hurricanes have a documented long history in the Caribbean, and occurred before the current climate-change crisis.¹

We will start with a crisis that was *entirely* the product of human action: Puerto Rico's state-induced long-term economic depression.

Cataclysm No. 1: Made in USA

Between 1996 and 2006, the United States Congress phased out a section of the Internal Revenue Code which provided tax incentives to corporations doing business in U.S. possessions. Residents of the island had no say in the Congress that changed the fiscal and regulatory environment for its economy.

Though the provision, known as Section 936, increased the economic dependence of Puerto Rico on foreign capital and had other problems,² it generated substantial investment and increased employment. Its phaseout, without providing an alternative path to economic development, generated a cataclysmic fall in manufacturing employment, from 158,000 jobs in 1996 to 71,400 in 2019.

This decline is captured in the graph below.³ There has been no economic growth in the island since 2006. In the space of ten years, more than half of Puerto Rico's manufacturing jobs evaporated. The multiplier effect of this drastic fall in employment was immense, and the island entered a period of long-term economic contraction, emigration and population decline. A social crisis ensued.

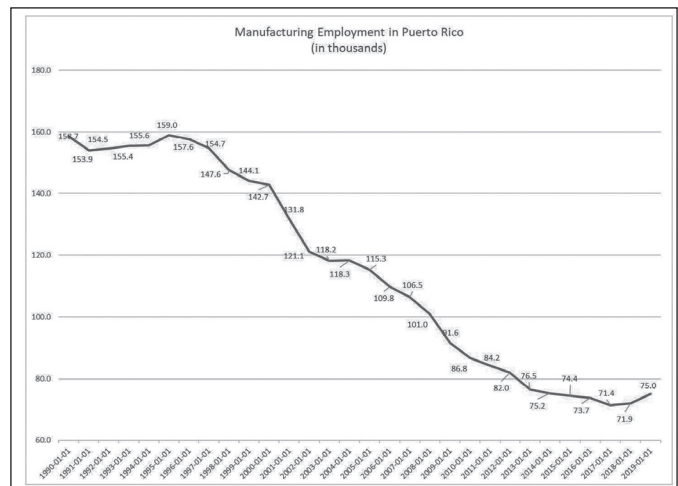
Throughout the 20th century, Puerto Rico's colonial econ-

omy was never able to provide enough employment to its population, and out-migration has been a steady component of the economic structure, especially since World War II.

The great migration of the 2000s was actually larger than the great migration of the 1950s, which firmly established many Puerto Rican communities in the United States, especially in New York.

There are two major differences between the current flow of out-migration and that of the 1950s. The current flow has as its principal destination the state of Florida, whose Puerto Rican population (1.2 million) has now surpassed that of New York (1.1 million). Secondly, unlike the migration of the 1950s, the wave of the 21st century has resulted in an absolute decline of the island's population.

According to the U.S. Census, Puerto Rico had 3,810,605 inhabitants in the year 2000, and 3,193,354 in 2018, a decline of 16% in 18 years. In 2021, the population rebounded a bit, to 3,263,584, on account of the return of some of the population who left the island after Hurricane María.



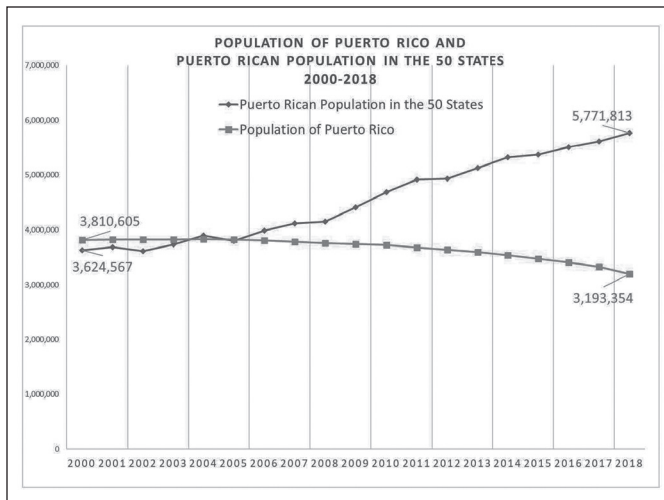
Source: Economic Research Division, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (<https://fred.stlouisfed.org>)

The economic and social effects of the decline in population were compounded by its age composition. The school-age population fell catastrophically by a full 36%, from 903,295 in 2010 to 572,331 in 2019.⁴

This, together with the government's neoliberal insistence on austerity measures, resulted in the closure of many schools and massive layoffs of teachers. Of the 1523 schools operating in the academic year 2006-07, only 850 remained in operation in academic year 2018-19. In other words, 44% of the island's schools closed down in the last decade.⁵

In the year 2004, for the first time the Puerto Rican popu-

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Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2000–2018.

lation in the United States surpassed that of the island. While the population of Puerto Rico declined from 3.8 to 3.2 million between 2000 and 2018, the Puerto Rican population living in the 50 states increased from 3.6 to 5.8 million.

Although population decline, out-migration, and the dramatic decline in the school age-population cannot be reduced to a single factor, the downward economic spiral of the 21st century was in a very direct sense “made in the USA.”⁶

This has occurred in a colonial economy controlled by U.S. absentee capitalists in which a larger than normal share of the economic product is siphoned out of the island in the form of repatriated profits. As much as one third of Puerto Rico’s Gross Domestic Product leaves the island as payments to absentee capital.⁷

Sooner or later, the protracted economic contraction initiated by the phaseout of Section 936 in 2006 was bound to have an impact on government finances. The government, to be sure, initiated a draconian set of cutbacks to deal with the crisis. But it also went on a borrowing spree to try to paper over the larger crisis, which was rooted in state policy and whose effects were long-term, as opposed to merely cyclical.

Public debt expanded by 64% between 2006 and 2014, from \$43 to \$71 billion. Increasing indebtedness and decreasing government revenues — partly driven by the reduction in the number of taxpayers — eventually led to the downgrading of the government’s credit rating in 2013. In 2015, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico defaulted on its debt.

Before Hurricane María, therefore, the island was in a deep economic crisis and on a downward spiral. The social dimensions of the crisis have been described in more detail in a former article in *Against the Current*.⁸ We will briefly mention government austerity policies and popular mobilizations against them.

To pay for increasing indebtedness acquired through an agency known as *COFINA* (*Corporación del Fondo de Interés Apremiante*), the government increased sales taxes. The Puerto Rico “Sales and Use Tax” rate is currently 10.5%, compared to average local sales tax of 6.57% in the United States.⁹

This was followed by Law No.7 in 2009 that led to the firing of more than 20,000 government employees. In 2014, Law No. 66 curtailed benefits, labor rights and collective bargaining in the public sector. Tuition at the University of

Puerto Rico was increased.

While all of these measures elicited protests, the mobilizations were insufficient to reverse the measures. Instead, many individuals and households opted to migrate to the United States in search of better work and living conditions.

Out-migration has long been known to constitute the fundamental escape valve of the colonial economy. Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States, and there are already large communities in the United States that constitute a network that facilitates migration.

In 2015, governor Alejandro García Padilla declared that Puerto Rico’s debt was “unpayable.” In 2016, the U.S. Congress adopted the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA), and created a Federal Oversight and Management Board, known in the island as “*La Junta de Control Fiscal*” or simply as “*La Junta*.” which has veto power over any expenditures proposed by the legislature of Puerto Rico.

In effect, the island is now governed, so to speak, by a collective colonial governor appointed in Washington. Before 1948, Puerto Rico’s governors were appointed by the U.S. president. Instead of one head, the new governing creature has seven heads, mostly bankers. This is a significant erosion of whatever self-government the island had achieved with the creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952.

The members of the Junta receive no pay, but they hire an army of expensive consultants whose remuneration hovers at around \$700/hour. The Board hires about a dozen law firms and about another dozen consulting firms. The average weekly salary barely exceeds \$500 in Puerto Rico, a bankrupt jurisdiction.¹⁰

While the *Junta* has functioned as an overseer of expenses, the federal courts have functioned as an arbiter between various claimants. Powerful vulture funds who purchased the devalued debt of Puerto Rico and its corporations have been at odds with the claims of local pension systems and many small stockholders whose savings were wiped out by the collapse of the price of bonds issued by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico or its public corporations.

Among the public corporations which acquired excessive debt in Puerto Rico was the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority or PREPA, the entity that generated, transmitted, and delivered electricity to enterprises and households in the island until last year. Initially created in 1941 under the name *Autoridad de Fuentes Fluviales*,

PREPA was one of the many creations of governor Rexford Tugwell and a coalition of local New Dealers which formed the Popular Democratic Party in 1938. The depression of the 1930s made many realize that unfettered market actors were unable to rise to the task of providing electricity to all residents of the island. The Great Depression also contributed to generalized skepticism about the ability of unfettered market actors to guarantee economic prosperity.

“Market failure,” as it is called today, had been the cause of the Great Depression in the first place. During the New Deal, Puerto Rico was assisted by massive state intervention in the economy in the form of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration, a New Deal entity with multiple industrial,

agrarian, commercial, and health functions that helped the island survive the ravages of the Great Depression.¹¹

The state-owned power company was created to replace the private companies that provided electricity to local markets in Puerto Rico before World War II, notably the Ponce Electric Co., Porto Rico Railway Light & Power Co., the Mayagüez Light, Power & Ice Co. and the Cambalache company in Arecibo.

These companies served the largest cities and their peripheries, but in most rural areas there was no electricity. According to Antonio Luchetti, the engineer who presided over the foundation of the state-owned power company, the private power companies were inefficient, offered poor service, and overcharged customers.¹² It should be noted that the arguments for state ownership articulated by Luchetti are the same as the rationales offered nowadays by neoliberal privatizers when they attack state ownership!

The state-owned power company was created in 1941 in the context of a world war that had already started in Europe and would soon be joined by the United States. During the war, Puerto Rico was of strategic importance in combating German U-Boat attacks against tankers and freighters.

German U-Boats paralyzed the flow of oil from Venezuela and of other strategic raw materials such as bauxite from the northern coast of South America. U-Boats sunk more ships in the Caribbean than in any other region of the planet including Northern Europe or Asia during World War II.¹³ During 1942, Puerto Rico was blockaded by U-Boats and the island came close to experiencing a famine.¹⁴

Progress and Regression

State intervention in the economy, which started during the New Deal to rescue capitalism from the Great Depression, intensified during World War II. In the context of war mobilization, private interests in the United States did not attempt to stop the U.S. government from creating state-owned enterprises at the service of the war effort. Electricity was fundamental to the operation of the cement companies, and these in turn were instrumental to the construction of roads to link U.S. military installations at opposite ends of the island.

During the long wave of expansion of the world economy from 1945-75, the state-owned power company brought electricity to all corners of the island, a significant achievement relative to the previous baronies of the local electricity companies, which provided service only to a few urban areas. The population of the countryside in particular benefited from the electrification provided by the state-owned company.

Both the *Autoridad de Fuentes Fluviales* and its successor the *Autoridad de Energía Eléctrica* (PREPA) were authorized to issue public bonds, and they paid their debt without incident. In 1938, the U.S. Congress modified the Organic Act of Puerto Rico to permit public companies to issue their own debt, above the debt of the insular government. The ability of public corporations to issue bonds was itself an innovation of the New Deal.¹⁵

The fate of the state-owned enterprises changed after the island began to experience economic difficulties, beginning in 1975, and the general attitude towards state-owned enterprise shifted dramatically after the ascension to power in the 1980s of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher

in the UK, initiating the period of neoliberalism across the world. By the time Hurricane María struck in 2017, PREPA was immersed in debt and had been the victim of government neglect and systematic mismanagement.

María 2017

Hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017. When it passed over the island it was a category 5 hurricane with winds of over 150 miles per hour. Its principal effect was the destruction of the electricity grid of the island.

The blackout produced by María is the longest in any U.S. jurisdiction in history. It took 11 months to restore electric service to the island.¹⁶ Many structures were destroyed or left without a roof, many families were displaced, and health systems collapsed due to lack of electricity. Floods destroyed bridges, particularly in rural mountain communities, which remained incommunicado sometimes for months.

According to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, there were 4645 excess deaths attributable to the storm between September 20, 2017 and December 31 of that year.¹⁷ It is now commonly accepted that the suspension of medical care due to the prolonged power outage caused by the storm was the principal cause of death in the months after the hurricane.¹⁸

Failure to provide dialysis and respirators (both of which require electricity) top the list of medical disasters, but do not exhaust it. The failure of the electrical grid led to failure of many water-processing and pumping stations. Many communities in the island remained without electricity or running water for months.

An epidemic of leptospirosis broke out, but medical estimates of the number of cases are uncertain. That is because the system for surveying and reporting notifiable diseases collapsed. “*With the outbreak of leptospirosis post-María, there was no concrete data to declare it was an epidemic issue. In truth, it turned out that [the information] was not being collected. [...] In fact, we don’t have data on anything that happened in those weeks [after the Hurricane], and that’s an example of the collapse at the structural level.*”¹⁹

Hurricane María’s impact did not happen in a vacuum. The ground had been prepared for the collapse by privatization of the health care system in the 1990s. The old public *Centros de Diagnóstico y Tratamiento* were privatized and sold to groups of doctors and investors. A host of subcontractors now provide insurance to the island in a very fragmented system in which the needs of a patient and the resources available may not meet due to lack of connection between specific medical providers and specific insurers.²⁰

There is a cap on federal aid for Medicaid in Puerto Rico, and the “block grant” model that has guided federal funding sets limits above which the government of Puerto Rico must provide the resources. Puerto Rico receives far lower funding per capita than the most disadvantaged states.

From 2012 to 2019, the annual federal block grant financed, on average, only 15% of Puerto Rico’s total Medicaid spending. The share of federal funding to Medicaid in Puerto Rico fell from 17.9% in 2012 to 13.9% in 2019. This has contributed to the Commonwealth’s indebtedness.²¹

The weaknesses in the electrical and health systems, although brought into sharp relief by Hurricane María, had long-term roots and were not created by the hurricane itself.

They were part of the long crisis of the economy since the downward spiral of economic contraction created by the loss of industrial jobs and the privatizations of the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the hurricane, there had been a “normalization” of the crisis situation and what emerged has been characterized as “an unspectacular ongoing disaster” linked to the “slow violence of colonial governance.”²² With the funding problems in the healthcare system, medical professionals are leaving the island in droves, mostly to the state of Florida, where they receive much better wages.

Between 2006 and 2016, that is to say before hurricane María, approximately 5500 of Puerto Rico’s 15,000 physicians (36%) had left the Island.²³ Patients wait months to see a specialist, and doctors have to handle much higher caseloads. This further exacerbates the incentives for the medical professionals to emigrate.

This slow-cooked disaster has now brought the Puerto Rican health system, even before hurricane Fiona, to a “state of collapse,” a phrase often used by medical providers themselves and the headline of a recent CBS article.²⁴ Additionally, Puerto Rico experienced earthquakes in December 2019 and January 2020, with strong aftershocks.²⁵ Some buildings were destroyed in the southern coast of the island.

Partial Privatization of PREPA

The reconstruction of the electric grid of Puerto Rico is without question the most important issue impeding economic development. Although federal assistance was approved, the Trump administration slowed down its release and most of the funds did not arrive.

According to a document released by the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) on September 15, 2022, the Government of Puerto Rico estimated that \$132 billion would be necessary from 2018 to 2028 for the reconstruction of infrastructure. As of August 2022, GAO estimated that the Federal Emergency Management Agency had “obligated” \$32.2 billion for public assistance projects, but Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands had spent only \$7.7 billion.

What the document does not specify, however, is that Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands had not spent the remaining funds because they had not yet received them!²⁶ This backlog in the delivery of federal assistance to Puerto Rico under the Trump administration is surely the background to president Biden’s comments, as Hurricane Ian was still striking Florida, that federal efforts would not slow down the recovery in Puerto Rico.²⁷

The administration of transmission and delivery of electricity to customers was privatized on June 30, 2021, to a U.S./Canadian corporation called LUMA. Infrastructure remains the property of PREPA, and dissatisfaction with the frequency of blackouts was used to promote this partial privatization of the electrical grid.

Ever since the privatization, however, dissatisfaction has increased in Puerto Rico, as the private company seems to be more inefficient than its predecessor; the frequency of blackouts has increased, and rates have soared under the new private management. The press is full of reports of consumers complaining that the private company is even less reliable than PREPA, and critics point to its dysfunctionality.²⁸

LUMA is the beachhead for even larger privatization

schemes down the line. The Fiscal Review Board (*La Junta*) is pressing for expensive and highly volatile natural gas plants, using the federal reconstruction funds to support natural gas, while increasing rates to pay for PREPA’s \$8.2 billion in old debt. Paying the accumulated debt of PREPA would push rates to 30 cents/kilowatt-hour over the long term and impede economic development, which the *Junta* itself claims requires rates no higher than 20 cents/kilowatt-hour.

The biggest challenge is fossil fuel costs, which are about to increase substantially as the war in Ukraine shuts off the supply of natural gas to Europe and drives prices for natural gas everywhere through the roof. At 33.4 cents/kilowatt-hour, consumers in Puerto Rico spend 8% of their income for electricity, compared to 2.4% in the United States on average.²⁹

While most of the electric grid still belongs to the public corporation, the real interest of LUMA investors is for their parent companies, Quanta Services and ATCO, to capture the contracts for the reconstruction of the electrical grid. These are expected to surpass \$12 billion as federal aid finally begins to flow.

According to *Cambio*, a local think-tank in Puerto Rico that is critical of the government’s dealings with LUMA, this is the real deal behind LUMA, as the company has expressed to its investors the great opportunities that lie ahead for the parent companies.³⁰

What Puerto Rico needs is reconstruction of the energy grid using renewable sources and a radical plan to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. PREPA has signed agreements for additional renewable energy but has not moved forward with them. Instead of promoting a rational plan to decrease dependence on fossil fuels, the *Junta* is now advocating a new *disincentive* to rooftop solar, the only element of renewable energy that has been rapidly growing in Puerto Rico. The *Junta*’s proposed measure benefits primarily bondholders, not Puerto Rico’s consumers.³¹

The government’s contract with LUMA was supposed to last for 15 years, but one of the conditions for it to go into effect was the resolution of the issue of PREPA’s indebtedness. Since PREPA’s debt had not been renegotiated when LUMA started operations on June 30, 2021, it is operating under a temporary “supplemental” contract until November 30, 2022.

Opponents of privatization argue that the upcoming expiration of the LUMA contract provides an opportunity to change course and force the government to rethink its privatization schemes. Increasing pressure on the *Junta* not to prioritize the needs of the local population could also redirect its priorities away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy.

Amidst all this, the COVID pandemic struck Puerto Rico barely two years after Hurricane María. Yet considering the state of the electricity grid and of the healthcare industry, government mandates to wear masks combined with an aggressive public information campaign kept COVID deaths at relatively low levels when compared to most jurisdictions in the United States.

The cumulative rate of deaths from COVID stands at 152 per 100,000 inhabitants, which compares favorably with the average for the 50 states as of October 1, 2020, of 318 deaths per 100,000. Among the states of the union, rates per 100,000 inhabitants range from a high of 434 in Mississippi at the high

end to 119 in Hawaii and 115 in Vermont at the low end.

Only two of the 50 states have lower death rates from COVID than Puerto Rico. Eighty percent of the population of the island is fully vaccinated against COVID, compared to 68% in the United States. Despite the infrastructural problems, the Commonwealth's public health interventions were relatively successful, in marked contrast to the healthcare crisis.

Natural and Man-Made Disasters

At this writing (October 1, 2022) only 12 days have elapsed since hurricane Fiona struck Puerto Rico. It is too early to tell what the full impact of the hurricane will be. It seems that the lower wind speeds of Fiona left most electricity poles standing, in sharp contrast to the situation five years ago after Hurricane María.

El Nuevo Día in Puerto Rico reports that 239,451 customers are still without electricity, which represents 16% of the island's approximately 1.6 million electricity customers. As was the case with María, but on a much smaller scale, the majority of deaths seem to be related to lack of access to medical services, due to lack of electricity or blocked roads. Many of the deaths are among elderly people who live by themselves.

As of the evening of September 30, LUMA reported that 88% of customers have electricity. Relative to the situation after Hurricane María in 2017, these are encouraging figures. The official death count is 25 as of September 30, 40% of deaths are among people over 75 years old, and all deaths are of people over 50.³²

Update: On October 4, Puerto Rico's Health Department confirmed the first post-Fiona death from leptospirosis.

These figures highlight the importance of electricity and the medical system to the elderly. Access to these two services can be a matter of life and death among those who are already fragile when a hurricane strikes.

Two hurricanes, a series of earthquakes, and two years of COVID pandemic in a period of five years is a lot to bear for any jurisdiction on this planet of ours. Yet as terrible as these (mostly) "natural" disasters are, they are not the main source of Puerto Rico's problems.

The man-made landscape on which these natural events unfolded carries equal or greater weight than the natural disasters themselves. At the very least, one can claim that the natural disasters brought into sharp relief the deficiencies of the colonial economy and the social disaster produced by the changes in federal tax policy, privatization of the healthcare system, and abandonment of public enterprises that provide essential public goods to the population of the island.

All these issues, in turn, are enveloped by the larger issue of Puerto Rico's status as one of the few remaining colonies in the world. ■

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Fiona's devastation, compounded by colonialism.

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After Parents' Mental Health Check Request: Detroit Police Kill — Again By Malik Miah

PORTER BURKS, 20, had a mental health emergency on October 2 when his family called for help. Detroit police found Burks with a pocketknife near his home. The five cops claimed they tried to talk to Porter, who was clearly stressed. But he refused to drop a knife they estimated was eight inches long. They alleged he then charged the five, which is when they fired 38 shots — in three seconds(!) — at the young Black man.

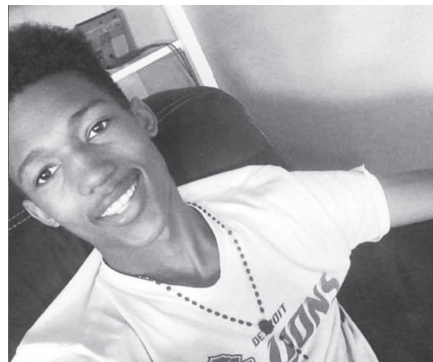
Family members said that navigating Burks' schizophrenia diagnoses had been difficult for them but when they called for a Health Check they did not expect a SWAT murder squad.

"The community knows Porter. They trusted Porter. They helped Porter. They loved Porter. He wasn't a threat to no one," Porter's aunt Michelle Wilson told the *Detroit Free Press*. She called the shooting "flat-out murder."

The family's lawyer Geoffrey Fieger said that Burks suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and was having a "psychotic break," which he believes should be treated in the same manner as a heart attack.

Although one of the officers was described as trained in crisis intervention, the five showed up armed and in uniform. Initially the police said Burks was tased and when that didn't stop him, he was shot.

Two days after the murder, the police held a press conference to release their preliminary findings. But the family was not invited. When they showed up anyway, they were not allowed to attend. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, Quieauna Wilson, Burks' mother, did not leave until she let the



Porter Burks at home.

media know that her son was shot and tased at the same time.

Protests Erupt

As with most police killings, the truth dribbles out. Protests erupted on the west side of the city where the family lives. They have joined in the demonstrations.

Detroit's chapter of the National Action Network and By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) have organized separate demonstrations, demanding that the officers involved be named and fired. Instead they have been placed on paid administrative leave.

Benjamin Royal, a BAMN spokesperson, pointed out: "Nobody should be bringing guns to a mental health crisis. What we really need is more mental health services, but above all, what we really need is those killer cops locked up, and their names made public, so we know who they are."

Cops rarely shoot and massacre a white man with mental health issues. The police

see him as a human being. But Burks was Black. He was seen as a likely threat to the police. That false view makes the killing justifiable — legal murder in effect.

Many have questioned how police are trained to respond to a mental health crisis. How could Porter be killed with supposed de-escalation protocols in place?

What Police Video Reveals

The police video released later shows Burks carrying a pocketknife, wandering in the street about 5 am. The crisis intervention officer can be seen with his hand out to Burks, repeatedly asking him to put the knife down. Burks never threatened the cops.

But because he was walking toward them with a knife, he was shot by several different cops, firing from different directions. Attorney Fieger said the distance between Burks and the police was not the short range police claimed, but closer to 46 feet.

"Why you can't figure out a better way to deal with him than executing him by firing squad?" Fieger asked.

A final insult by the police, Fieger said, was to have Porter's body handcuffed after being shot multiple times and "dumped" at the hospital.

The System Failed Porter Burks

In the past Burks had gone to the hospital for psychiatric care at least twice, according to Chris Graveline, director of the Department of Professional Standards within the police department.

On June 26, Graveline pointed out, the family called Detroit police because he was walking up and down the block. He was committed to Sinai Grace psychological ward, two days Detroit police received a call that he had escaped.

Detroit's Police Chief James White stated that the mental health system failed Porter Burks. According to Detroit police statistics, just over the past year there was a ten percent increase in requested police calls for service involving mental illness.

However, blaming the underfunded health care system leaves the police off the hook. It's the trauma unleashed by our society that needs to be addressed. ■

Malik Miah is an advisory editor of Against the Current.

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Celebrating Sandinista triumph, July 19, 1979: After Somoza's rout could anyone imagine there could be another dictator?

Daniel Ortega & the Ghost of Louis Bonaparte: **Nicaragua Today** By William I. Robinson

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx referred to the Napoleonic return to power in the French coup of 1851 as “first as tragedy, then as farce.” There could be no more fitting a characterization of the saga of Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega’s conversion — in about as many years as had lapsed from the fall of the first Napoleon Bonaparte to the coup carried out by his nephew Louis — from a socialist revolutionary to a repressive and corrupt petty dictator.

Significant portions of the international left, however, have swallowed wholesale the Ortega regime’s legitimating discourse. These sectors claim that since he returned to power in 2007, Ortega has picked up where the Sandinista revolution of the 1980s left off, and is under siege by the United States.

An instinctive, uncritical “anti-imperialism” appears to predominate among these sectors, who confuse appearance with essence and rhetoric with reality while studiously ignoring evidence or analysis of the actual programmatic content of, or the class relations behind, the Ortega government.

The regime now faces a steep erosion of its legitimacy in the wake of the tarnished elections¹ of November 2021 and ongoing political repression of its opponents, a deteriorating economy, and rising levels of poverty and unemployment.

I have been writing for some time now about this degen-

eration of Sandinismo and the descent of Nicaragua into dictatorship. Here I want to update and deepen the historical and political analysis.

From Sandinismo to Orteguismo

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) led the mass insurrection that overthrew the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in 1979, ushering in a popular and socialist-oriented revolution that won broad support among the left around the world.

The murderous U.S.-organized counterrevolution² of the 1980s eventually led to the Sandinistas being voted out of office in 1990. An internal party crisis over programs, ideology and strategy ensued in the following years amidst mass defections and the centralization of power by the Ortega faction, as Sandinismo metamorphosed into Orteguismo.

As is well known, in this age of globalized capitalism international financial markets impose severe limits on transformative possibilities in any one country as they constrain and distort national political processes in favor of capital and its local political agents. The worldwide left nonetheless has yet to reckon theoretically with just how quickly and thoroughly Third World revolutionary parties and their leaderships who came to power in the latter decades of the 20th century — in Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam and elsewhere — were wont to shed revolutionary ideology, embrace capitalism, join the ranks of the bourgeoisie, demobilize what were politicized mass bases, and brazenly pilfer public resources.

In Nicaragua, the metamorphosis did not take place over-

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night. The internal party struggle played out to the drumbeat of sometimes bloody class struggle in the streets following the return to power in 1990 of the traditional oligarchy.

While the popular grassroots in and outside the party mounted fierce resistance to the neoliberalism that came with the post-1990 restoration of the capitalist order, a new Sandinista elite appeared among those who had acquired substantial properties by privatizing to themselves³ what were state assets and public property, known as the “*piñata*” in Nicaragua.

The leading Sandinistas grouped around Ortega went on to heavily invest in tourism, agroindustry, finance, import-export, and subcontracting for the *maquiladoras*, coming to share an affinity of class interests with the traditional bourgeoisie.

The new Sandinista elite gradually moved from leading the popular classes in their resistance to the counterrevolutionary program of capitalist reconstruction to utilizing the party’s dwindling authority to contain these classes and control their mobilization. The FSLN leadership, however, continued to legitimate itself with a revolutionary discourse that no longer corresponded to any political program or conduct other than that of furthering its own group interests and securing a place among the dominant bloc in the new neoliberal order.

Successive governments, meanwhile, deployed the army and police — now shorn of their original revolutionary political orientation — to defend the old and new propertied classes against popular protests.

As the 1990s progressed, the internal party crisis became a struggle over leadership. The party’s statutes⁴ called for collective deliberation over party decisions, for internal elections to all party posts, internal primaries for candidates in national elections, and for deliberative party congresses to serve as the highest authority of the FSLN.

By the turn of the century these statutes had become a dead letter and the party life that had existed in the 1980s disappeared. The Ortega faction managed to definitively capture the party apparatus and to exercise an iron-clad control over it following its 1998 congress and to bring to an end the push for internal party renovation and democratization.

From that point on the FSLN ceased to function as a left political party. Ortega dissolved the collective leadership mechanism historically exercised through a National Directorate, first of nine and later of 15 members, and replaced it with his own autocratic rule as the FSLN became an electoral machine for his presidential aspirations.

Corrupt Deals

Immediately following the 1998 congress, Ortega negotiated a heavily-criticized pact⁵ with the far-right Constitutionalist Liberal Party and its corrupt leader Arnoldo Alemán, who had won the 1996 presidential election, to divide up government power and the spoils of state.

In the wake of the pact and despite leftist rhetoric, the FSLN turned to containing⁶ mass grassroots mobilizations against privatizations and structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank. These mobilizations came to threaten the economic interests of the new Sandinista bourgeoisie — and also to constitute an obstacle to Ortega’s plan to negotiate with the traditional elite his return to power.

In the years leading up to the 2006 elections that brought him back to power, Ortega renewed his pact with the Liberals, suspended primary elections in the FSLN, hastily convened a party meeting to announce that he would be the Sandinista candidate, and expelled remaining dissidents who he claimed were “traitors.”⁷ All subsequent party meetings have been relegated to rubber stamping decisions made by Ortega and the courtiers that now surrounded him.

Ortega also made pacts with the former Somocistas and armed counterrevolutionaries (known as the *contras*), with the conservative Catholic Church hierarchy, and with the right-wing evangelical sects. To garner Church support the FSLN promised

and then delivered a total ban on abortions,⁸ even when the mother’s life is at risk.

In one much-publicized appearance with Catholic Church head Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo — whom he had previously referred to as “the Somocista chaplain” over his support for the Somoza dictatorship — Ortega issued a public “confession”⁹ for the “sins” the Sandinistas had committed during the 1980s revolution.

Then, as it made a bid for office in the 2006 elections that brought Ortega back to power, the FSLN assured the Nicaraguan capitalist class, organized into the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), that it would defend capitalist interests¹⁰ so long as the bourgeoisie did not question the Sandinista monopoly of political power.

The FSLN’s economic program, laid out in a 2006 policy document¹¹ drafted in close coordination with COSEP, called for linking small-scale producers to the large-scale private sector; “respect for all forms of property;” free trade, attracting transnational corporate investment and expanding agro-industry.

It was not until the 2018 mass protests that the bourgeoisie broke with Ortega, when it became clear that the regime had lost its legitimacy and capacity to govern and to defend capitalist interests, and not until the 2021 pre-electoral political crackdown that representatives of the bourgeoisie came under the repression that had previously been reserved for grassroots opponents of the government.

Absolute Control and Family Dynasty

By the time the FSLN returned to power Ortega and his inner circle had consolidated its absolute control over the party, which by then had been emptied of any socialist content. Meanwhile, the ruling couple — Ortega’s wife, Rosario

“Orteguismo has arrogated for itself the historic symbols of the Sandinista revolution, including revolutionary songs by the celebrated musicians Carlos Enrique and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy, both former Sandinista party militants who have been sent into exile along with thousands of other Sandinistas, including a major portion of the historic political and military leadership of the party.”

Murillo, is also the vice president — is on path to become a family dynasty as they build a cult of personality around themselves.

The couple's eight children serve as advisors to the presidency and manage the family's secretive empire¹² of at least 22 corporations¹³ involved in oil and gas, hotels and tourism, media, real estate, finance and investment funds, and customs and import-export trade. The circuits of capital accumulation in the country now appear to hinge on a combination of favorable state concessions and personal dependence on the dictatorship.

Upon assuming office in January 2007, Ortega threw down the welcoming mat to the transnational capitalist class. Its strategy of capitalist development rested on attracting transnational corporate investment to the country's abundant natural resources with 10-year across-the-board tax holidays,¹⁴ deregulation, unrestricted freedom to repatriate profits, and a labor force disciplined by the party's corporatist control over unions and popular organizations along with heavy doses of repression when workers did mount protest.

This model of control is remarkably similar to the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico during the decades that it held power in that country. By generating propitious conditions for transnational capital accumulation, including the lowest wages¹⁵ in all of Latin America outside of Cuba, Nicaragua became a magnet for foreign investment, which poured into the free trade zones, agroindustry, tourism, mining, and logging.

Early in their return to power and with the pact with COSEP secure, the Orteguistas set out to construct a populist multiclass alliance around a project of capitalist development under the firm hegemony of capital and Sandinista state elites. Former Sandinista guerrilla commander and close Ortega ally Tomas Borge explained¹⁶ the new policies of class conciliation as "realistic because to work for the poor without fighting the rich is now possible."

The model at first improved material conditions, with investment in infrastructure and social assistance programs distributed through clientelist networks, funded by the massive influx of foreign investment, high commodities prices, and above all some \$4 billion dollars in Venezuelan subsidies as part of the ALBA alliance.

The wave of capitalist expansion, however, was brief. As Venezuelan funds dried up and commodities prices dropped the economy began to tank in 2015 and then plummeted in the wake of the 2018 mass uprising. Poverty rates dropped from 2007 to 2014 but subsequently climbed up again, reaching 45% of the population in 2019 and wiping out the earlier gains.¹⁷

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America¹⁸ estimated a growth rate for 2022 of 1.8% — not enough for the economy to recover from its tumble since 2018, despite a recovery from the 2020 Covid crash — while *The Economist's*¹⁹ Economic Intelligence Unit predicts stagna-



Left: Dora Maria Téllez, legendary FSLN guerrilla, relaxing for a moment after the 1979 revolution. She served as Minister of Health in the first Sandinista government. Right: Confined and isolated since her June 2021 arrest, Téllez was tried and sentenced last February for conspiring to commit damage to national integrity and sentenced to 15 years.



tion through to 2026 (the magazine praised the Nicaraguan government for imposing neoliberal austerity measures).

End of an Illusion

In the larger pictures, Nicaragua's troubles are rooted in the contradictions of the country's capitalist development, part of the process of capitalist globalization that has involved a vast expansion of mining operations, agribusiness, tourism, energy extraction, and infrastructure mega-projects throughout Latin America to feed a voracious global economy and swell transnational corporate coffers.

The FSLN's contradictory project of promoting social investment on the one hand, and unfettered transnational capital accumulation on the other through concessions, tax breaks, and repression of worker and peasant protest and political dissent, eventually caught up with the Ortega government.

As economic difficulties mounted and growth rates dropped off in the mid-2010s, the government reached agreements with international financial institutions to implement an increasingly neoliberal program, including cutting subsidies to electricity, decreasing social spending, privatizing infrastructure, and reducing pensions.

The government's announcement that it would cut pension payments to retirees and increase the contribution required by workers and businesses was the immediate trigger for the April 2018 mass uprising, its violent repression, and the descent into outright dictatorship. But popular discontent, political tension and social conflict built up for years.

Leading up to the 2021 elections, Ortega carried out a wave of repression, arresting and detaining without trial dozens of opposition figures, among them presidential candidates, peasant, labor and student leaders, journalists and environmentalists, and forced several hundred others underground or into exile, where they joined some 100,000 who have left into political exile since 2018.

But the repression has continued since the vote in what appears to be a strategy to purge civil society²⁰ of any civic group independent from the ruling party and state apparatus. The government has forced the closure of over 1400 civil society organization²¹ as of July 2022, from universities, to

student, artistic, and religious groups, feminist collectives, environmental and human rights organizations, medical, scientific, educational, cultural and other professional associations.

While the first targets were tied to political opponents of the regime, the crackdown has subsequently targeted any and every organization and association not controlled directly by the ruling party. Most of those arrested in the leadup to last year's elections and then subsequent to them have been sentenced for "treason" to long prison terms in secret trials held in the prisons themselves, with no attorneys or journalists allowed to be present.

Throughout 2021 the government decreed a series of draconian national security laws²² that suspended *habeas corpus* and gave the government sweeping powers to detain and prosecute anyone who under any circumstances criticizes the regime. The laws define "treason" in such sweeping terms as to include, for example, anyone who "undermines independence, sovereignty and self-determination," who "damages the supreme interests of the nation," or who "undermines national integrity."

The laws also criminalize a wide range of online communications, including punishing with lengthy prison sentences anyone who "publishes" or "disseminates" whatever the government deems to be "false" or "distorted" information or "ideological falsehoods" that are "likely to spread anxiety, anguish or fear."

The repression targeted with a particular vengeance a number of Ortega's former comrades in arms, among them legendary guerrilla commanders Dora María Téllez and Hugo Torres. Both participated in the 1978 raid on the National Palace that forced the Somoza dictatorship to free 60 political prisoners, and Torres also participated in the daring 1974 Christmas party raid that forced Somoza to release Daniel Ortega from prison.

Torres died in hospital in February 2022 after languishing for eight months in jail without trial and without medical attention. Téllez' life now appears to be in danger.²³ After 14 months in detention she is suffering from acute malnutrition and a lack of medical attention. She has been held in 24-hour lockdown in solitary confinement in an unlit cell, prohibited from meeting with her attorneys and has not been allowed any reading or writing material.

Against the Pink Tide Current

The Pink Tide, or the turn to the left over the past two decades in Latin America, has ebbed and flowed as leftist governments have largely accommodated themselves to the global capitalist order in the region. Despite its socialist rhetoric, however, the Ortega regime should not be seen — as it too often is — as part of this Tide, given the absence of any leftist orientation to the regime beyond its rhetoric.

Unlike Bolivia, for example, which nationalized hydrocarbons, lithium, and other resources, and also sharply increased taxes on corporate profits after the Movement Towards Socialism came to power in 2006, the Ortega government has not nationalized any of the country's resources.

To the contrary, there has been no change in property and class relations under Ortega. Banking, agriculture, industry, imports, and exports are all controlled by local and transnational capitalist conglomerates; 96% of the country's property is in the hands of the private sector²⁴ while land tenure in

the countryside is back to pre-1979 patterns of extreme concentration.

And while the deceased Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez led the charge against U.S. president George Bush's plan for a Free Trade Area of the Americas, forcing Washington to abandon the project in 2005, the incoming Ortega government welcomed the U.S.-designed Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) pact in 2006 at a time when social movements throughout the Central American Isthmus were mounting large scale protests against it.

Under Ortega the exploitative *maquiladora* industry rapidly expanded in Free Trade Zones, where over 100,000 mostly young women stitch clothing for Asian and North American corporations and their Nicaraguan subcontractors. Transnational capitalists preferred Nicaragua over neighboring countries due to extremely low wages, strict worker control, and relative political stability achieved by the Ortega government until 2018.

Workers earn an average of \$157 a month, the lowest wage of any *maquiladora* workers²⁵ in Central America and estimated to cover barely 33% of a household's basic necessities. In 2016 riot police violently repressed²⁶ a strike for higher wages, better working conditions, and the right to organize independent unions, leading to an international campaign to release from detention those jailed for the action.

A new "gold rush" currently underway is emblematic of the hegemony of transnational capital. Sixty percent of the national territory has been made available for transnational mining companies that have descended on the country to exploit the abundant gold reserves, now Nicaragua's principal export.

Over the past decade these transnational mining conglomerates from Canada, the United States, Brazil, the UK, Japan, Mexico and France among other countries, have exported \$4.13 billion dollars in minerals. Thanks to generous tax holidays and other concessions granted by the regime, only \$130 million of this bonanza, some three percent of all mining receipts, was collected by the Nicaraguan government.²⁷

Meanwhile the government has deployed police and paramilitary units to repress mine workers²⁸ and community activists who have protested low wages, environmentally-damaging mining practices, and the giveaways to the companies.

Washington was never comfortable with Ortega's return to power and would now like to see him go, but not at the expense of jeopardizing capitalist interests or destabilizing U.S. policy in the region. Ortega's diplomatic condemnation of U.S. intervention around the world, and Managua's progressive stance in many international organizations, has earned the ire of U.S. policymakers — and has also confused "anti-imperialists" who see this as evidence that his government should be supported by leftists.

According to this convoluted reasoning, if Washington would prefer to see Ortega replaced by a more traditional representative of the capitalist oligarchy, then by fiat *Orteguismo* constitutes a revolutionary process and those who oppose it are counterrevolutionary instruments of U.S. imperialism.

Defenders of the Ortega regime claim that Nicaragua is reeling under U.S. economic sanctions and that Washington is engaged in counterrevolutionary "regime change" warfare against the Central American country.

In fact, today there are no U.S. trade or commercial sanctions on Nicaragua. The United States is Nicaragua's principal trading partner. Bilateral trade surpassed \$6 billion in 2021.²⁹ Nicaragua remains to date a member of the CAFTA, which gives it preferential access to the U.S. market. Washington has not blocked the flow of international credits to Managua.

From 2017 to 2021 alone Nicaragua received over \$3 billion in credits from international financial institutions, among the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The Ortegaistas point to several million dollars supplied to opposition civic groups by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), channeled through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), touted as proof that Washington is bent on overthrowing the regime. What they fail to mention is that the NED provides such funding to over 100 countries around the world, most of them close U.S. allies, and that USAID also granted several hundred million dollars³⁰ directly to the Ortega government from 2007 until 2018.

Unlike the 1980s, Nicaragua in this century has not faced U.S. military or paramilitary aggression. This is in sharp distinction to the other two countries — Cuba and Venezuela — that former U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton notoriously called the “Troika of Tyranny” in Latin America, who have faced all-out and devastating blockades and paramilitary attacks.

Even if Washington were intent on overthrowing the Ortega regime, there is no internal coercive apparatus that could carry out a *coup d'état*, as the Nicaraguan army, police, and paramilitary forces are all Sandinista institutions controlled by Ortega.

In fact, up until the 2018 mass popular uprising against his regime and its violent repression, Washington commended Ortega for its close cooperation with the U.S. Southern Command, which is responsible for all Pentagon operations in Latin America and which supplied the regime with small amounts of military assistance, with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, and with U.S. immigration policy by blocking transit through the country of migrants headed north.

Since 2018, U.S. policymakers have tried to bring about a “soft landing” that would ease Ortega out of power without jeopardizing capitalist stability and elite hegemony in the country.

What Nicaragua has faced beyond diplomatic condemnation from Washington is individual sanctions leveled on the private bank accounts and properties that several dozen top Ortegaistas hold in the United States. Washington passed two laws, the NICA Act in 2017 and the RENACER Act in 2021, both of which call for targeted sanctions on individuals from the Ortega inner circle found guilty of human rights violations

and corruption. (Such individual sanctions are not directed specifically to Nicaragua; they are region-wide and apply as well to El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala.)

While one may condemn Washington, as I do, for unilaterally arrogating to itself the right to impose sanctions on foreign individuals or countries, we would have to ask why would-be socialist revolutionaries have millions of dollars in personal assets tucked away in the United States.



Daniel Ortega has appropriated the historic symbols of the Sandinista Revolution for his regime.

Deepening Political-Economic Crisis

The regime had hoped that by winning the November 2021 elections it would renew its waning legitimacy, but the integrity of the process was fatally compromised by the wave of repression against its opponents carried out in the six months leading up to the vote.

The government declared that Ortega won 75% of the vote and that 65% of voters cast ballots. But independent sources reported an abstention rate³¹ of approximately 80% and widespread irregularities at polling stations around the country. Apart from political exiles, since the election there has been a mass exodus of several hundred thousand

Nicaraguans joining other Central Americans in migrating north³² as political and economic conditions deteriorate.

While some among the international left condemn selective U.S. sanctions on the Ortega inner circle, this self-same international left, in fact, broadly mobilized (unsuccessfully) in 1978 and 1979 to force Washington to impose sanctions on the Somoza dictatorship and to block international financing to it because of its gross human rights violations.

The worldwide left similarly demanded sanctions against apartheid South Africa, sought to block U.S. and international financing for the Pinochet dictatorship, and currently calls for “boycott, divestment, sanctions” in support of Palestinian rights violated by Israel.

For the record, I do not support trade sanctions on Nicaragua nor do I recognize that the United States has the right to unilaterally impose sanctions on other countries. The point is to highlight hypocrisy and double-standards not just by Washington — which does not impose sanctions on gross human rights violators allied with it, such as the Saudi and the Egyptian regimes — but also by leftists who defend Ortegaismo.

This hypocrisy became clear in regard to the Organization of American States (OAS). In the wake of the November 2021 elections, the OAS passed a resolution declaring that the Nicaraguan elections lacked “democratic legitimacy.” In response, the Nicaraguan government took the highly unusual step of nullifying its membership in the organization.

While it is absolutely true that the OAS has historically operated as an instrument for U.S. policy in Latin America, the Ortegaistas' charge that it violated Nicaragua's sovereignty rang hollow, and not just because the systematic violation of

human rights is not covered by the principle in international law of nonintervention in the internal affairs of nations.

In fact, the Sandinistas and their left supporters around the world actually demanded in 1978 that the OAS and Washington impose sanctions on Nicaragua. Following their daring August 1978 storming of Somoza's National Palace, FSLN guerrilla leaders turned to sympathetic governments in Latin America to bring to the OAS the case³³ for sanctions against Somoza.

The FSLN then lobbied hard inside the organization — through the mediation of the Panamanian, Mexican, and other sympathetic governments — for a resolution, passed just weeks before the definitive overthrow of Somoza on July 19, 1979, that declared the Somoza government illegitimate and called for its immediate replacement with a “democratic government.”

The capitalist class and its political agents were just as disturbed as Ortega by the outburst of popular protest from below in the 2018 uprising, and tried to hitch mass discontent to their own agenda of recovering direct political power and assuring there would be no threat to their control over the Nicaraguan economy. They pinned their hopes in the wake of that uprising on winning the 2021 elections but those hopes were dashed by Ortega's pre-electoral crackdown.

The traditional rightwing parties, weak and feeble, lack any coherent strategy and are in a state of political disorganization. To date the business sector remains divided, with some searching for a viable opposition strategy and others seeking a rapprochement through renewed backdoor negotiations³⁴ with Ortega.

The mass of Nicaraguans, beyond the Sandinistas' secure base in some 20% of the population, have not shown any enthusiasm for the traditional conservative parties and businessmen that dominate the opposition. The people have no real political representation.

Orteguismo has arrogated for itself the historic symbols of the Sandinista revolution, including revolutionary songs by the celebrated musicians Carlos Enrique and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy, both former Sandinista party militants who have been sent into exile along with thousands of other Sandinistas, including a major portion of the historic political and military leadership of the party.

The regime has so monopolized and disfigured a “leftist” discourse that there is no significant left alternative in Nicaragua. Popular sectors from below have no project of their own to put forward as a viable alternative to replace the regime. They are caught since 2018 between the corrupt and repressive Ortega government and the capitalist class and its political agents.

The tragedy in Nicaragua is that the bourgeoisie and the traditional rightwing oligarchy managed to achieve hegemony over the anti-Ortega opposition thanks to the regime's brutal suppression of the social movements of workers, peasants, women, environmentalists and students. ■

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Climate Change Makes You Sick

THE “2022 Report of the Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change: Health at the mercy of Fossil Fuels” issues a stark warning. According to the Executive Summary:

“Countries and health systems continue to contend with the health, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a persistent fossil fuel overdependence has pushed the world into global energy and cost-of-living crises. As these crises unfold, climate change escalates unabated. Its worsening impacts are increasingly affecting the foundations of human health and wellbeing, exacerbating the vulnerability of the world's populations to concurrent health threats.

“During 2021 and 2022, extreme weather events caused devastation across every continent, adding further pressure to health services already grappling with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. . . Because of the rapidly increasing temperatures, vulnerable populations (adults older than 65 years, and children younger than one year of age) were exposed to 3.7 billion more heatwave days in 2021 than annually in 1986–2005, and heat-related deaths increased by 68% between 2000–04 and 2017–21, a death toll that was significantly exacerbated by the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Simultaneously, the changing climate is affecting the spread of infectious diseases, putting populations at higher risk of emerging diseases and co-epidemics. Coastal waters are becoming more suitable for the transmission of Vibrio pathogens; the number of months suitable for malaria transmission increased by 31.3% in the highland areas of the Americas and 13.8% in the highland areas of Africa from 1951–60 to 2012–21, and the likelihood of dengue transmission rose by 12% in the same period.”

[[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)01540-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)01540-9/fulltext)]

What's Changed, What Hasn't? Imperialism Transformed

By Peter Drucker

WHAT FOLLOWS IS an edited version of a talk given on August 20 as the first of four online lectures held by the Amsterdam-based International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) on “the changing shapes of imperialism” after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. All four talks can be streamed online at <https://www.iire.org/node/1015>.

SINCE FEBRUARY 24, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, imperialism looks different. Not for the first time — since its origin in the late 19th century, imperialism has changed its shape in major ways several times.

Big shifts occurred in the aftermath of the Second World War and again with the rise of neoliberal globalization in the 1980s, culminating in the “hyperglobalization” that lasted from about 1995 to 2008. Each time, features of imperialism that Marxists had considered central were thrown into question. Now this is happening again.

Each phase of imperialism has given rise to crucial political debates and divisions on the left: over “defensism” versus “defeatism” during the First World War, and again during the Second World War; over attitudes toward wars of national liberation during the Cold War; over a proposed reconceptualization of imperialism as “Empire” in the period of neoliberal globalization.

Today, with the war in Ukraine, there are debates about sanctions against Russia, sending arms to Ukraine, and attitudes toward NATO expansion (now and in retrospect). Potentially similar issues are looming around the conflict between China and Taiwan.

I won't try to address all these issues in this introductory lecture. I will leave most of the specific questions around Russia and China to the other three lectures: by Pierre Rousset on the rise of China, by Hanna Perekhoda and Catherine Samary on Ukraine, and by Ilya Matveev on Russia. (Though I can't resist saying a thing or two on those issues myself).

My focus today will be on the overall theoretical and historical basics. Looking at each of the previous phases of imperialism, I'll put forward some propositions about which features of those earlier phases still apply today and which don't. Also, since the other three lectures won't focus on the United States and the European Union, this one will devote particular attention to U.S. and European imperialisms — which have definitely not gone away!

Key Points

To be upfront about what I'm arguing, let me lay out some

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key points.

First, what do Marxists mean by imperialism? War and conquest far predate 19th-century colonial empires, or the Cold War, or neoliberal globalization. The first wave of European global expansion, launched by 15th-century Portugal and 16th-century Spain, even predated capitalism. The British conquest of India and the French conquest of Algeria, though carried out by capitalist states, still did not fit many of the key features of imperialism later theorized by Marxists.

To be very schematic: beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, European and later U.S. and Japanese global expansion, as several Marxists analyzed it, was characterized by a deeper penetration of capitalist relations into production, trade and investment in the conquered regions, and a more direct domination by capitalist companies based in the dominant countries: “cartels” and “trusts” in Lenin's time, multinational corporations and banks today.

These have been the key abiding features of the imperialist order, even as it has mutated radically several times over the past century and a half. So what is specific about imperialism today? By comparison with the Cold War years or the period of hyperglobalization, this is a time of heightened instability, recurrent crises, and geopolitical turmoil. Yet more than in the Cold War years — when capitalist and non-capitalist great powers faced off — imperialism is today a truly global order.

Aside from a few isolated states like Cuba and North Korea, every country is now essentially capitalist. And global capitalism can and must be analyzed as a whole. The United States, European Union, Japan, China and Russia are conflicting but still integral parts of this whole.

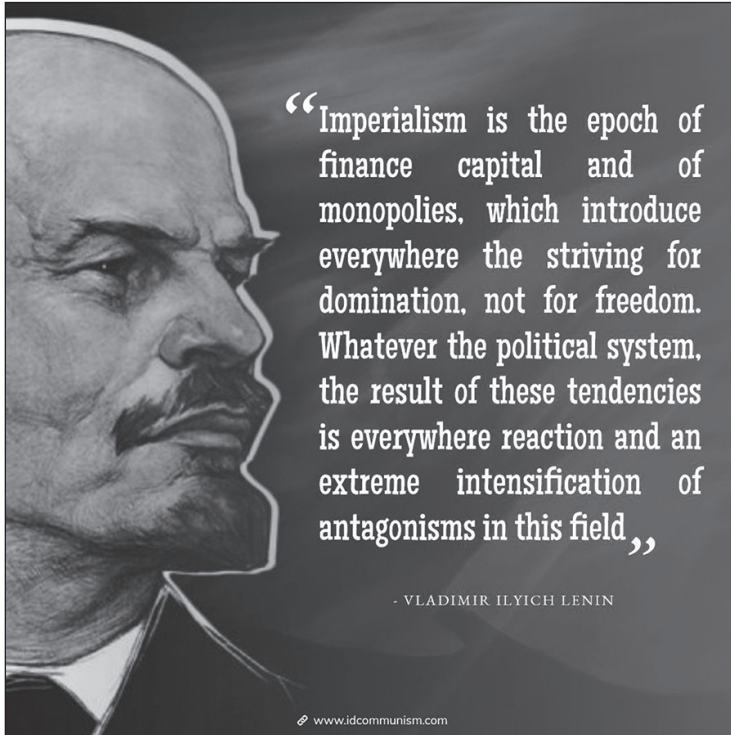
This analysis is a theoretical basis for a political position: an anti-campist politics, meaning a politics that opposes all camps. Within this imperialist global order, there is no major “anti-imperialist” power, that is, no major power that resists the overall dynamic of globalized capitalism.

This means that we should acknowledge the reality of Russian and Chinese imperialisms and intransigently oppose them, without seeing them as lesser evils, since ultimately they are part of the same global evil.

At the same time, we must remain intransigently opposed to U.S., European and Japanese imperialism, refusing to see them as lesser evils — even regionally or locally, for example in Ukraine. In other words, our analysis needs to lay the basis for a revolutionary politics independent of all imperialisms.

Relevance of Lenin's Analysis

To start with, let me go back to basics. For me this means going back to Lenin. Although Luxemburg, Bukharin, Hilferding and others made important contributions over a century ago



“Imperialism is the epoch of finance capital and of monopolies, which introduce everywhere the striving for domination, not for freedom. Whatever the political system, the result of these tendencies is everywhere reaction and an extreme intensification of antagonisms in this field,”

- VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

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to a Marxist understanding of imperialism, I want to stress several key insights of Lenin's that I think are still valid today.

First, Lenin (like other Marxists in his time) understood imperialism as a fundamentally economic reality. Formal colonialism and militarism were subordinated in his analysis to that economic reality.

Second — a point often neglected — Lenin understood the heterogeneity of different imperialisms. For example, in Lenin's time tsarist imperialism was economically weak, and thus especially dependent on military power to safeguard the economic dominance of Russian capital across the tsarist empire.

British, German and U.S. capitals were all economically strong enough to exercise power beyond the bounds of the states they dominated; that was much less true of Russian capital. It is also less true today of Putin's Russia.

As for China, despite the strength and dynamism of its economy, its imperialism involves an exceptionally strong role for the state and ruling party. Paradoxically, Chinese capitalism owes much of its resilience to the anti-capitalist revolution that forged that state and ruling party.

The European Union is at the opposite end of the imperialist spectrum from Russia: its economic strength is out of proportion to its military means. This means that the EU can adopt an apparently pacific stance in Ukraine without diminishing its economic power over Ukraine.

Yet as the saying goes, the EU is a giant with feet of clay. Militarily, the EU is still very much dependent on U.S. capabilities — aircraft carriers, for instance — to project military power to other parts of the world, or even to some extent within Europe. So while Europe exercises imperial economic power beyond the EU's borders, it is dependent on the United States to sustain that power militarily.

The key point here is that while Lenin in his time understood the differences between the United States and tsarist Russia, he characterized them both as imperialist. We should

do the same today with all the different imperialist powers.

Third, Lenin distinguished between established imperialisms, which concentrated on defending the status quo, and rising, more aggressive imperialisms like Germany. Yet during the First World War, he refused to view more established powers like Britain and France as less imperialist — essentially the same position that Trotsky adopted regarding the Second World War.

Fourth, Lenin saw the main dividing line in the world as the one between all the imperialist powers, on the one hand, and the countries and regions dominated by imperialism, on the other.

He saw this as a structural divide, based on ongoing relationships of economic subordination: imperial powers' dominant market and financial positions, their privileged access to raw materials, and so on. And this was mainly an economic divide, not a juridical one. That is, formally independent countries like China, Persia and Mexico, which Lenin called “semi-colonies,” were still dominated by imperialism.

This analysis applies today to Ukraine. Ukraine is defending its national sovereignty in the current war. Yet its 2015 association agreement with the EU, which ended a period in which Ukraine balanced between Russia and the EU, has forced it to open its market to EU exports and investments.

The agreement also obligated Ukraine to adopt a range of EU rules which, as a non-member state, it had no say in drafting. This makes it essentially a semi-colony of the EU. In defending its independence, it is also defending the EU's economic sphere of influence.

The structural divide between imperialist and dominated countries is also manifest today in the global impact of the Ukraine war. The war is causing suffering in many countries. Europeans for example, especially working and poor Europeans, will suffer badly from rising energy prices this winter. But the consequences for dependent countries are far more devastating.

For many decades, domestic food production was decimated in many dependent countries by neoliberal globalization, especially in the EU's African, Caribbean and Pacific “backyard” where Europe established itself as a huge agricultural exporter. Today dependent countries' peoples can no longer afford food in a world deprived of Ukrainian grain. People will starve, at a time when global warming — yet another consequence of a terribly unequal global economy — was already devastating agriculture in many countries of the global South.

Resistance is Progressive

One last point about Lenin's analysis — a key political point — Lenin believed that whenever independent resistance to imperialist domination arose in a dominated country, that resistance was progressive and worthy of support. On this point he disagreed with Rosa Luxemburg's argument that in the era of imperialism only a revolutionary socialist movement could be genuinely independent of all imperialisms.

This was at stake in Lenin's debate with Luxemburg over the 1916 Irish Easter rising. Lenin supported the Irish rebels against British imperialism, and would have supported them even if they had taken weapons from Germany, because he

saw that their rebellion was independent in practice from outside direction by any imperialist power.

There was no comparison between the situation of the Irish rebels in 1916 and the situation of the Serbian and Belgian governments, almost all of whose territory had been quickly occupied by Germany and Austria-Hungary and whose decisions were therefore overwhelmingly subordinated to British and French military commands.

This same logic underlies Marxists' support today for Ukraine in its fight against Russian imperialism, despite its getting arms from NATO countries. For all his political shortcomings, Zelensky today has a freedom of maneuver that rules out seeing him as a simple NATO stooge.

For that matter, while Zelensky is in the last analysis a rightwing neoliberal — juggling imperialist interests with the interests of Ukrainian oligarchs, particularly the one whose media empire created him — he is still not a creature of the reactionary far right, despite some leftists' inflated portrayals of fascist power in Ukraine.

In this sense, we can be far less ambivalent about Ukrainian battlefield victories than about say, the Taliban's victory over imperialism in Afghanistan. Defeating the Taliban with a puppet Afghan government and army was always hopeless. The Ukrainian resistance is by no means hopeless in that sense, because the Ukrainian government is not that kind of puppet regime.

NATO Without Illusions

Moving on to later phases of imperialism — the Cold War and the period of neoliberal globalization — allows us to appreciate some other important political points.

After 1945, one central feature of imperialism as Lenin had analyzed it no longer held true. Lenin had believed that conflicting interests between different capitals would inevitably lead to wars between imperialist states. Between 1945 and 1991, this didn't happen. There weren't inter-imperialist wars remotely comparable to the First or Second World Wars.

In fact, inter-imperialist economic rivalry remained a constant and growing reality of the Cold War period. What was new was the U.S. role as a military guarantor of the imperialist order as a whole, faced with non-capitalist great powers like the USSR and China and with anti-colonial revolutions in countries like Vietnam and Cuba that became anti-capitalist revolutions.

As one dimension of its global military role, the United States was among other things the central power in NATO. NATO was a "defensive" alliance only in the sense that it was defending the imperialist order. The U.S. commitment to defend Western Europe was part and parcel of the its defense of capitalism worldwide, even while Washington's commitment to defending European colonial empires was combined with a push to pry open those empires for a more level capitalist playing field.

The central U.S. military role has outlived the Cold War, and in fact outlived the major challenges to capitalism as such. Still today in 2022, United States military spending is 38% of the world total. And NATO today is still one of the U.S. global military instruments.

The Soviet military threat to Western Europe was much greater in the late 1940s than the Russian threat to the EU countries is today. After all, Soviet troops were present in

Berlin, Prague and Vienna, while U.S. troops that had marched into Western Europe were rapidly demobilized under popular pressure after 1945.

Despite the devastation of the USSR during the war, Soviet conventional military superiority was overwhelming afterwards. The U.S. nuclear monopoly (which ended in 1949) was seen as vital to stopping a Soviet advance in a new war, and French and Italian Communists were seen as powerful fifth columns. Putin with his connections to European far-rightists has nothing comparable today.

Marxist opposition to NATO's founding in 1949, even among anti-Stalinist Marxists, depended on understanding the global character of the imperialist order. This is still true today — in fact, far more true today, now that NATO has gone "out of area" in order to avoid going "out of business."

NATO's role in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2022 had no parallel in a NATO role in Algeria or Vietnam during the Cold War. This should make it easier to oppose NATO today — when, for example, Sweden's joining NATO has such direct consequences for the oppression of Kurds in Turkey. (The Erdogan regime is demanding the extradition of Kurdish activists from Sweden — ed.)

One more continuity with the Cold War should be noted: the economic dividend that the U.S. military role yields for U.S. capital. This was manifest during the Cold War, for example in 1985 when Reagan prevailed on Europe to prop up U.S. trade by allowing the dollar to depreciate, in an implicit quid pro quo for the U.S. defense of Europe.

It was still apparent after the Cold War, when U.S. and British multinationals like Shell and BP benefitted from Saddam Hussein's defeat at the expense of French and Chinese oil companies, whose states hadn't backed the U.S. war effort. Still today, U.S. companies benefit from advantages in Eastern Europe that they wouldn't have without Washington's military role in the region.

Globalization and its Changes

In short: we do, and do not, still live in the imperialist world that Lenin described. We do, and do not, live in the world of the Cold War.

Are we still living in the period of neoliberal globalization? To answer this question, we need to distinguish the neoliberal globalization that began with Thatcher, Reagan and the 1982 debt crisis from the later period of "hyperglobalization" (to



The fall of Saigon, 1975, was a major defeat for U.S. imperialism — but the empire would survive, and strike back.

use the term coined by economist Dani Rodrik).

Following Saigon's fall in 1975 and the liberation of Managua in the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, neoliberalism restored the global hegemony of trilateral capital (U.S./EU/Japan).

Partly this was due to the "normal" operation of real international capitalist competition, which usually tends to worsen global inequality by favoring rich countries and regions over poor ones (as Charlie Post explains in a forthcoming article in *Spectre*). Partly also (in Claudio Katz' analysis) it was due to a new set of mechanisms of value transfer: forced indebtedness, structural adjustment policies including forcing markets open, increased repatriation of multinational profits, reining in the prerogatives of dependent states, etc.

However exactly it happened, neoliberal globalization largely reversed the relative gains made by dependent countries during the Cold War, largely due to the geopolitical and policy space opened up by U.S.-Soviet rivalry.

Neoliberalism reaffirmed the imperialist character of the world order. This is contrary to Thomas Friedman's thesis that "the world is flat," meaning that national power made far less economic difference in a globalized world — and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's thesis that we were all living in a less differentiated "Empire" with no dominating center.

The fantasies of the 1990s about Brazil or South Africa overtaking the United States and Europe have been exploded. Even India, with its over a billion people, still has a GDP (in nominal terms) smaller than Germany's, with its 80-some million. The world is not flat; it is steeply hierarchical.

Moreover, despite all the economic tensions and ruptures of the past few years and months, Russia and China are still integrated into the capitalist world economy. Even if the United States, the EU and Japan do much more to reduce strategic dependence on Russia and China — as they probably will — their threatened "decoupling" still has a long way to go.

Russia for example still has an export-oriented extractivist economy. Even if Chinese capital has emerged as a serious competitor to other capitals in Africa and Latin America, it is still competing on terms that were largely dictated by Western capital in the 1990s. In this sense, we still live in a neoliberal world.

But something crucial has changed. The pre-2008 period of virtually complete worldwide political domination by multinational capital has ended. And the period of Russian and Chinese acquiescence in a Western-designed order is over. Inter-imperialist conflicts are intensifying.

It's important to see that this is true across the board, on every side of the deepening international dividing lines. Vladimir Putin is not Boris Yeltsin, Xi Jinping is not Deng Xiaoping — and at the same time, Trump and even Biden are not George H.W. Bush.

Biden has not restored the World Trade Organization appellate panels (which can't function since Trump refused to appoint new judges — ed.), has not rolled back sanctions on China, has not joined the International Criminal Court. There has been a lasting recomposition in the main imperialist states of what Nicos Poulantzas called the "power bloc": the relationship of forces at state level between different fractions of capital.

In this changed situation, the rivalries between the imperialist blocs are complex and constantly shifting. Viewed from

one angle, for example, Putin's invasion of Ukraine did U.S. imperialism a big favor. It restored U.S. prestige at a time when the Afghan defeat had badly dented it. It pushed the United States and EU into each other's arms when Trump had badly strained US-European ties, and suddenly made raising NATO military budgets much easier (unfortunately).

But earlier tensions between the blocs have given way to new ones. Europe today is divided between countries like the UK and Poland, which tend to follow the aggressive U.S. line, and countries like France and Germany, which remain less inclined to burn all their bridges with Russia. The repercussions of this war will continue to be wide-ranging and unpredictable.

In any event there is a nationalist shift, reflected in but not limited to the rise of the far right. It is reflected in the rise of racism and xenophobia worldwide. And there is a vicious cycle of conflict between "femonationalism" — to use Sara Farris' term for the instrumentalization of women's rights by imperialist governments and the right — and more traditional patriarchal ideology.

The same vicious cycle of conflict exists between "homonationalism" (to use Jasbir Puar's term for the similar instrumentalization of LGBTI rights) and what I call heteronationalism: the instrumentalization of anti-LGBTI ideology by more or less "anti-Western" regimes (e.g. Putin, Orban).

This too is a dimension of the dividing lines being drawn today in the world. Yet it is in many ways an ideological smoke-screen, on both sides, in what is still a unified imperialist order.

Self-Determination

I will mostly leave it to the other three lectures to draw out the specific implications of all this for the current conflicts on the Eurasian land mass. But I will close with one overarching political point.

Today as in Lenin's time, Marxists need to be champions of self-determination. At the same time, today as a century ago, our defense of self-determination needs to be informed by an understanding that no imperialist power can be counted on as an ally.

In Ukraine today, it is understandable and justified for Ukrainians to want weapons from NATO to defend themselves. But as Gilbert Achcar has pointed out, U.S. and British schemes to use Ukraine to punish and constrain Russia are both dangerous — given the mind-boggling risks of nuclear war — and futile, because ultimately a complete Ukrainian military victory over Russia is impossible as long as the Putin regime remains unshaken.

Ultimately, the only hope for full Ukrainian national liberation lies in international solidarity with the Russian opposition. This means that the stupid nationalism (in this specific case) of anti-Russian cultural and sports boycotts are the last thing the Ukrainians need.

So are sanctions that hurt Russian working people, while leaving oligarchs and energy multinationals rolling in ill-gotten excess profits. History has demonstrated time and again that measures that make civilians suffer are effective only in lining them up behind their countries' governments.

This means that today as a century ago, a politics of national liberation must be an across-the-board anti-imperialist politics: a politics of revolutionary internationalism. ■

Wild East Capitalism: About Russian Neo-Imperialism

By Bernd Gehrke

For **BORIS ROMANCHENKO**¹

THERE HAS RARELY been such an embarrassment of leftist positions: Russia's war of aggression against independent Ukraine has made absurd the assessment expressed shortly before by many (and some prominent "campist" or pacifist) leftists that, despite the military saber-rattling on Ukraine's borders, no threat of war emanated from Russia.

The most important players in the German peace movement have publicly acknowledged their error, so a fair discussion with them is possible. But there has been little discussion about what the reasons were for this fundamental misjudgment. Probably one of the most important causes for the misjudgment is the lack of preoccupation with the aggressive character of Russian contemporary capitalism.

This preoccupation is necessary, not only because of the current war against Ukraine and the danger of nuclear war that has once again become apparent. The previous crushing of the political opposition in Russia, and the increasing repression of the Putin regime during the war, poses the danger that the regime will develop from authoritarian presidential rule into an openly totalitarian-fascist regime, as the Russian sociologist Greg Yudin recently noted.²

For example, it was almost completely lost in the flood of war news that shortly after the war began, security forces for hours occupied the premises of the Memorial human rights organization in Moscow, which was banned at the end of 2021, and confiscated numerous documents and computers.

In view of the war in Ukraine and the numerous crimes against Russian civil society, this incident seems almost harmless. However, like the banning of Memorial itself, the raid makes clear that this is an attack on every precondition of social self-organization: on the discussion of independent narratives of history and society, in favor of a totalitarian ruling ideology.

Yet the virtually hopeless economic situation into which the invasion of Ukraine has brought Russian capitalism poses a considerable danger not only for the Russian opposition. Radicalization and increasing violence on the part of the Putin regime, both internally and externally, are to be feared. At the same time, Russia's foreign policy goals, which have already been proclaimed, are threatening enough for its neighbors and for Europe as a whole.

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The Putin regime today not only openly embodies the arch-reactionary ideology of the global New Right in cultural and domestic politics, but the brutal reality of authoritarian-repressive and neoliberal Wild East capitalism with all its ugliness that's likewise clearly before everyone's eyes.

Russia's internal constitution should make deception about the character of Russian foreign policy impossible — "should," were it not for the fact that many on the left look the other way. So the German left hardly discusses the character of Russian wild-east capitalism, whose brutality differs little from that of wild-west capitalism in the emerging countries of the South.

The standard of living of wage earners is far lower and rural infrastructures far less developed than in the West, showing that Russia is still a Second World country. Moreover, it is a country with an extreme contrast of poverty and wealth, with that small layer of the one percent super-rich facing a huge mass of poor people.

The so-called middle class, on the other hand, comprises a maximum of 10% of the population. One of the first measures after Putin took office as president was the introduction of a neoliberal flat tax of only 13% on incomes and the implementation of various deregulation and privatization measures.

The daily struggle for existence in the big cities with their masses of precarious jobs, which like the country's construction sites are filled by migrant low-wage workers from Russia's backyard in Central Asia, constantly increases the pressure on militant trade unions by the phalanx of state and capital.

The western left has shown little interest in this dramatic situation of the working classes in Russia, which is similar to the situation in other emerging countries. Likewise, it has shown little interest in land grabbing and the overexploitation of nature on a huge scale, accompanied by violent actions and death threats against eco-activists and resisting small farmers. There is even a small trade union or NGO, "Alternative," whose goal is the liberation of people from private slavery.

There exists a vast force field of corruption affecting virtually every aspect of political power, the police, the judiciary and capital. The resulting open exploitation of people and the overexploitation of nature not only makes clear the kleptocratic character of the connection between the authoritarian state apparatus and real wild-east capitalism. It also explains the many murders of investigative journalists.

State protection laws for people and nature, if they exist, are usually only a polished accessory for the often overtly violent enforcement of capital's interests.

Western multinationals such as Coca Cola and Volkswagen (VW) behave no differently in Russia than they do, for exam-



The “oligarchs” bought up assets of the USSR at fire-sale prices, becoming billionaires and launching a kind of mafia capitalism.

ple, in Mexico.

The Example of Volkswagen

In 2019 VW management presented a wage settlement below the rate of inflation in negotiations with two company unions. When one of the two unions, MPRA, part of the independent Confederation of Labor (KTR)³, which represented 38% of the workforce in the collective bargaining committee, began collecting signatures from the workforce to solicit their opinions, VW management banned it from the plant floor.

Because the collection of signatures continued outside the plant gate, VW accused the unionists of “terrorism” and called the police. The regional labor ministry, in collusion with the governor, then banned the signature gathering, clearly contravening existing legal rights of the unions.⁴ We have long known this practice of cronyism of the German flagship corporation with authoritarian regimes, Brazil or apartheid South Africa being prominent examples.

This incident became a prelude to a major attack by the Russian state and capital on the rights of dependent employees and trade unions in general in the following year. On May 23, 2020 the State Duma decided to abolish the previous Labor Code, which had enshrined the autonomous negotiation of labor relations by companies and trade unions.

It has now been replaced by a law “unique in the world,” as Oleg Shein, vice chairman of the KTR, wrote. In this new version, labor relations are now “regulated by state regulations,” and in the event of a “conflict between the Labour Code and government decisions,” the government’s decision now “takes precedence.”⁵ Militant trade unionists engaged in internationalist solidarity activities are also increasingly threatened by the “foreign agents” law, also used against Memorial and other human rights groups.⁶

Nomenklatura Capitalism

To understand the Putin regime’s actions, it is important to recall the genesis of today’s Russian capitalism and its emergence from the despotic former ruling “communist” nomenklatura (the privileged Soviet-era party bureaucracy — ed.).

After the failed coup of the Soviet security apparatuses in August 1991, President Boris Yeltsin initiated a shock strategy of liberalization and the ultra-fast privatization of Soviet state

property. The stated goal was the rapid creation of a private “ownership class” in order to ensure the irreversibility of the capitalist path in Russia.

The result of this policy was a dramatic deepening of the already existing social and economic crisis, with disastrous consequences for the lives of most of Russia’s citizens. The average life expectancy of men fell to under 58 years, pensioners in Moscow rummaged through garbage cans for food, people made homeless by privatization camped out in Red Square, wages went unpaid for months, and miners went on strike for a bar of soap.

Privatization of state property was largely carried out through criminal channels. Through trickery, fraud, corruption and violence, companies and banks very quickly “got into the pockets” of former “red directors” and other members of the “communist” nomenklatura.

In a very short time, billions of dollars in assets were created during these “founding years” of oligarch power. Mafiosi helped just as diligently as dismissed KGB, army and police members. Thus, a corrupt and criminal network of former directors, security guards and mafiosi emerged, who had no hesitation to use violent methods to further redistribute former state property in the 1990s.

The 1990s in Russia resembled the mafia confrontations in 1930s Chicago, as can be read from many examples, such as the books of murdered journalist Anna Politkovskaya. An apt term for the system that emerged was quickly found: “nomenklatura capitalism,” a capitalism that had emerged from the division of previous state property among the former “communist” nomenklatura.⁷

Czars, Stalin, Putin

It is quite amazing when “campist” leftists see Vladimir Putin, admired by the global far right, as a poor victim of the West — that Putin who, according to Steve Bannon and his rightwing U.S. co-thinkers, is not “woke” and “has the balls” to mess with the decadent West. Apparently, Putin-defending leftists are prisoners of their own symbolic politics, as the Putin regime uses Soviet symbols of victory over Hitler’s Germany, or denazification, especially now in the war against Ukraine.

This seems to fit into these leftists’ worldview. But it overlooks the fact that the flags of the Soviet navy also flutter on the masts of Russian billionaires’ yachts, and that the Putin regime uses not only Soviet symbols but also those of tsarism, both proclaiming the “greatness of Russia.”

In this construct, the Soviet Union is openly and circumstantially regarded as what it had become under Stalin: a specific variant of the Greater Russian Empire. This is precisely why Putin so resolutely hates Lenin, who saw the Soviet Union not as a continuation of the Russian Empire, but as a union of Soviet republics based on the right of peoples to self-determination.

But how does the use of Soviet symbolism go together with the reactionary-nationalist practice of the present?

Since 2012, and especially since the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in 2017, the regime has managed to

create a historical ideology centered on the narrative of the positive nature of a Great Russian authoritarian state. In it, a development from the tsars to Stalin to Putin is constructed. Lenin has been largely erased from memory, unless he has to be held up as the culprit in the downfall of the Soviet Russian state from 1989 to 1991.

The times of the so called “Great Russian Revolution” are seen as periods of turmoil, in which Reds and Whites both wanted the best for Russia, and which eventually produced the rise of the strong Stalinist state in succession to the Tsarist Empire. Here Russia had reached its greatest expansion and its standing as a world power.

In this nationalistic way, symbols and cults of the Soviet state handed down among large groups of the people, as recollections of victory in “the Great Patriotic War” (World War II) can be mixed with the symbols of tsarism to create a reactionary melange of Russia’s greatness. In this nationalistic sense, the term “reconciliation” became the central domestic political slogan regarding the history of the 20th century.

Therefore, the holiday of May 9 today stands not so much as a symbol of remembrance of Russia’s sacrifices in defeating Hitler’s Germany and for “Never again war!,” but emphasizes Russia’s strength today and the possibility of repeating the “march to Berlin” in the struggle against the West.

No wonder that the censorship authorities have now recognized even a Youtube-Video with the famous poet Yevtushenko’s lyrics “Do you think the Russians want war?” as a statement likely to endanger the state, and they have thus banned the video clip.⁸

Contrary to some reactionary demands, out of consideration for the “conservatism” of the masses, statues of Lenin are allowed to remain standing for the time being. Yet official ideology, taking up ideas of a “Russian Eurasia” and other arch-reactionary beliefs, is profoundly “anti-Western” and “anti-liberal” and ethically conservative. It means “Russia, but normal,” to borrow an election slogan of the Alternative for Germany.⁹

This ideology is coupled with a belief in Russia’s “anti-decadent” mission and a desire for revenge for the demise of the former Russian world power called the Soviet Union. Putin’s face, distorted with rage, when he spoke of the “drug addicts in the Ukrainian government” was as genuine an expression of this ideology as was the proclamation by the Patriarch of Moscow, Cyril, that Russia’s struggle in Ukraine was justified because it was directed against the rule of homosexuals that supposedly existed there.

The Telling Beginning of Putin’s Career

Only those who disregard the criminal-capitalist turn of the authoritarian “communist” nomenklatura, which already produced dictatorial features at the beginning of the capitalist transformation of ex-Soviet state property, can be puzzled by this reactionary ideology.

At the end of 1993, when Russia’s path to capitalism seemed politically secured by Yeltsin’s deployment of tanks against Russia’s elected Congress of People’s Deputies, a delegation of leading German managers went to Russia to sound out investment conditions. During a meeting with Vladimir Putin, the deputy mayor of St. Petersburg at the time, who was responsible for looking after foreign investors, a remarkable conversation took place, which not only says something about



Vladimir Putin denounces Lenin for upholding the rights of self-determination and secession for the republics of the Soviet Union.

the rulers in Russia at the time, about Putin’s way of thinking even at the beginning of his political career, but also about the German managers.

When the camera present at the meeting was turned off, a German general manager asked Mr. Putin whether a Chilean-style military dictatorship was being considered in Russia, not only in military circles. Mr. Putin answered very unequivocally, “If you ask like that ... I favor a Pinochet dictatorship in Russia.”

At the end of 1993, the newspaper Neues Deutschland, on the basis of a documentary by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) radio network a few days later, supplemented the deputy mayor’s remarks as follows:

“In this context, Mr. Putin distinguished between ‘necessary’ and ‘criminal’ violence. He said that political violence is criminal if it is aimed at eliminating market-economy conditions, and ‘necessary’ if it promotes or protects private capital investments.

“He, Putin, expressly approved of possible preparations by Yeltsin and the military to bring about a Pinochet-style dictatorship in view of the difficult economic path to privatization. Putin’s remarks were received with friendly applause by both the German company representatives and the deputy German consul general who was present.”¹⁰

The answer seems to have pleased the German gentlemen, because they all came and invested in Russia — Siemens, VW, Daimler, the chemical industry, and many more.

Putin and the Oligarchy

As deputy mayor, Putin was quite successful in organizing corruption-based deals between old “red” business cadres, Western managers or mafiosi with politicians, and a “successful” lunch with Mayor Sobchak could cost over \$100,000. In any case, the economic situation in St. Petersburg was much more favorable than in the rest of the country, which is why Putin was brought to Moscow by Yeltsin’s staff and, after an interlude as FSB chief, soon became Russia’s prime minister.

The oligarchs, to whose election campaign Yeltsin owed his own reelection and a second term in 1996, unabashedly determined Kremlin policy. To secure their power and fortunes, they also organized the transfer of presidential power when Yeltsin had to step down after two terms in 2000. Thus Yeltsin handed over his office to Putin, who was considered a “reformer” and a man of the oligarchs, even before the end of

the election period.

Immediately, the systematic staging of Putin as a bear-riding, dragon-killing superhero began. Putin used a terrorist attack (apartment bombings — ed.) in Moscow, presumably orchestrated by the secret services, to launch the second Chechen war. Through this, he demonstrated new strength and the restoration of Russia's "honour," which won him great approval in the 2000 presidential election.

He received equally strong popular support when Putin took on those who had brought him to power: the oligarchs. He guaranteed them the assets they had stolen, but only if they did not interfere in politics.

This was exemplified by the ousting and punishment of the richest man in Russia at the time, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. After he clashed with the president in front of running television cameras over corruption in the state apparatus and went into opposition to the president, he was arrested in 2003 and sentenced to eight years in prison in 2005.

The charge was aggravated fraud and tax evasion with damages to the Russian state of more than one billion U.S. dollars. His oil company Yukos was divided among state-owned companies. But in the background of this dispute there was also an economic-political conflict, because Putin intended to bring the oil and gas industry back into state ownership or control as an economically and politically strategically important branch for Russia.

In addition to limiting the reach of the oligarchy rooted in the criminal privatization of the 1990s, the authoritarian presidential system created by Putin produced another phenomenon. Now the cadres of the former KGB took control of the oligarchy, and furthermore now produced their own oligarchs from their ranks. Often, it was the president's old associates and confidants who owed their new wealth to him.

Thus, Putin effectively created a new "state oligarchy" alongside and above Yeltsin's "private oligarchy." They occupy the most important positions in the state apparatus and state corporations as well as exercising economic control, forming a tight network of politics and strategically important economic sectors. Through their functions, their members also have the opportunity to line their own pockets. For this reason, the members of this "state oligarchy" remain all the more loyal to "the Putin system."

Modernization of the Economy Fails

The way in which authoritarian politics and the economy are closely intertwined has consequences not only for democracy in Russia, but also for long-term economic development. The problem is the political entrenchment of two dominant economic blocs in a common political power bloc dominated by secret service agents, with the president at its center.

On one hand there is the oil and gas industry, which surpasses all other civilian economic sectors in size and the high degree of monopolization; on the other hand, the industry that develops and exports coal. In addition, there is the military-industrial complex (MIC).

The monopolistic capital strength of both economic power blocs almost regularly leads to innovative companies emerging alongside them either being bought up or forced out of the market. The subordination of Russia's great intellectual potential, for example in the IT sector, to the needs of the military and intelligence services is another eloquent example of the

resulting longterm weakening of civilian sectors, perpetuating the paradoxical situation of this giant country remaining absent from the world market.

The modernization of the fossil industry and the MIK, at the expense of the modernization of the rest of the civilian economic sphere, is the power-structure-related fatal flaw permanently impeding economic development in Russia. The Putin regime's power structure, based on economic rents resulting from kleptocratically consumed fossil fuel rents, is therefore itself the best guarantee of Russia's longterm economic lag behind its imperialist competitors.

The contradiction between Russia as a nuclear superpower and its economic status at the level of Brazil, which Vladimir Putin and his entourage certainly recognized as a problem, had led to the president's declared goal of Russia becoming one of the world's five largest economic powers by 2024.

Tacitly, however, this goal had to be put on hold. More recent forecasts before the attack on Ukraine said that Russia's economy would stagnate in the long term and remain at about the same place in 2035 as it is today. But by that time, the fossil fuel consumption of the key countries in Europe, the main consumers of such forms of energy, will have declined dramatically.¹¹

Violence Instead of Modernization

Vladimir Putin has understood the importance of the time factor in the competition between empires. In his speech and his contributions to the discussion at the Russian Valdai Discussion Club in 2021, he declared that the next few years will decide who will be the center and who will be the periphery in the world.¹²

His policies in recent years make it clear that he and his entourage must have realized that this battle cannot be won on the economic field. With his brutal suppression of any opposition at home, massive aid to the suppression of the revolts in Belarus and Kazakhstan, and his statement in January 2022 that Russia would not tolerate any revolution in the post-Soviet space, Putin had clearly expressed his willingness to escalate violence both internally and externally.

Whether Russia's longterm economic weakness, for which the character of the regime itself is mainly responsible, formed the final, decisive trigger for the war of aggression on Ukraine against the background of the time factor cannot be answered definitively. However, it can be assumed with some degree of certainty that it was at least one of the main factors behind the decision to go to war.

If Russia cannot become a major economic power in the long run, then violence is the only means left to be a major power. The longterm economic weakness on the one hand, and Russia's claim to great world power status on the other, explain the increasing aggressiveness of the Putin regime's policies.

But not alone! The belief in a historical mission of a great Russian empire vis-à-vis the "decadent West," which is deeply rooted in Russia's ruling class and in Putin himself, always includes Ukraine. This is not only for pseudo-historical reasons, but also because, as is well known according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, Russia without Ukraine is a great country but not an empire.

However, the imperial dream is far greater yet. Putin's assertion that the forcible annexation and colonization of the Baltic

countries by the Soviet Union in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin Pact took place in accordance with valid international law does not bode well for all the other peoples of the Russian-Soviet prison-house of nations who became independent from Russia in 1991, such as Moldova (the Romanian-speaking Bessarabia looted by the Tsarists and Stalin) or Georgia.¹³ Moreover, Putin's junior assistant Dmitry Medvedev had announced when he was president that Russia had the right to intervene wherever ethnic Russians lived. And that applies to all former Soviet republics, including those that are now members of the EU and NATO.

The draft treaties submitted by Russia to the United States and NATO in December 2021, which called for the reversal of NATO in Eastern Europe, indicate more than clearly that Russia also seeks renewed control over former Warsaw Treaty countries in Eastern Europe.

The revanchist ambitions of Russian neo-imperialism thus clearly have the potential for further wars. But they are also reasons for the fear-driven flight of these countries under the supposedly protective wings of the United States and the West. The limited possibilities for the Putin regime to achieve its political goals in the "near abroad" and in Eastern Europe through economic or even cultural hegemony, and its fear of mass movements, are what makes this regime so aggressive and dangerous.

It is high time for leftists in the West to finally take note of the deeply reactionary and aggressive development of the Putin regime. There can be no neutrality for the left against this regime, which should of course not mean knocking on NATO's door. Above all, a socialist left must once again become an independent political force with its own design for a new world order. ■

Notes

1. Boris Romanchenko died at the end of March 2022 at the age of 96 in a Russian artillery attack on Kharkiv in his apartment. He was a Ukrainian forced laborer in

- Nazi Germany and survived four fascist concentration camps. As vice chairman of the Buchenwald-Dora International Committee, he actively campaigned for the memory of Nazi crimes until his old age.
2. Cf. David Ernesto Garcia Doell: "A Fascist Regime Looms in Russia" Interview with Greg Yudin; <https://www.akweb.de/politik/greg-yudin-in-russland-droht-ein-faschistisches-regime/>
 3. The independent unions of the Confederation of Labor (KTR) formed independently of the state after 1989, while the successor to the Soviet "state unions" continues today to pursue a policy of co-management with capital that is loyal to the regime. Although the KTR unions have far fewer members than the state unions, most labor disputes are led by the KTR unions or small independent trade unions.
 4. Cf. Doro Zinke: "Russia — Free Trade Unions under Pressure." DGB, <https://www.dgb.de/themen/++co++26a99e66-a7ca-11e9-a475-52540088cada> [Accessed 12.01.2022].
 5. Cf. Oleg Shein: "Russian Capitalism and coronavirus," KTR News, 27.05.20; <http://ktr.su/en/content/news/detail.php?ID=6893> [Accessed 12.01.2022]
 6. Cf. Bernd Gehrke, "In memoriam Memorial?" in express. Zeitung für sozialistische Betriebs — und Gewerkschaftsarbeit; Frankfurt/Main, No. 2-3/2022, 7-8.
 7. See also the article by Slave Cubela in express 4/2022: "A Neoliberal Monster in Moscow" on Putin's Invasion of Ukraine, 8-9.
 8. Cf. <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/kultur/wir-sind-keine-militaerdictatur-zensur-em-poert-russlands-medien,T2K1lGM> [accessed 25.03.2022].
 9. The "Alternative for Germany" (AfD) is the largest party of the New Right in Germany. Its campaign slogan in the last federal election was "Germany, but normal!" It was directed against the "left-green filthy hippie republic" in favor of an authoritarian-conservative restructuring of society [accessed 25.03.2022].
 10. Cf. Vice Mayor of St. Petersburg Vladimir Putin for military dictatorship in Russia along Chilean lines, In: Neues Deutschland, 31.12.1993 [accessed 25.03.2022]. The conversation at that time was recently shown again in a new ZDF documentary, which is available in the ZDF-Mediathek. Cf. ZDF-Zeit: Putin's Truth: The Five Mistakes of the West, documentary by Florian Huber, broadcast March 24, 2022, min. 13:43 -16:11; <https://www.zdf.de/dokumentation/zdfzeit/zdfzeit-putins-wahrheit-100.html> [accessed 25.03.2022].
 11. Both the West's tightened sanctions against strategic technologies since February 24, 2022, and the mass emigration of intellectual potential from Russia mean a real disaster for the country's modernization in the long term. Not only Western, even Chinese companies are now withdrawing from the country, despite all of Beijing's political promises of alliance. [B. G., 7/1/2022]
 12. Cf. Vladimir Putin took part in a plenary session of the 18th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, October 21, 2021; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/by-date/21.10.2021> [accessed 25.03.2022].
 13. So far, the Russian Federation has never confirmed the Soviet decree on the independence of the Baltic states. Just a few weeks ago, an ultranationalist Duma deputy from Putin's United Russia party introduced a bill declaring the Soviet decree illegal. For now, the bill has been put on hold, but no one knows for how long. Meanwhile, Putin himself has openly placed himself in the tradition of Tsar Peter I's western conquest of the Baltics and talked about "bringing Russian soil home."

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REVIEW

From Civil War to Class War:

Veterans in Politics & Labor

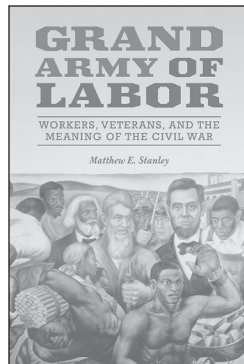
By Steve Early & Suzanne Gordon

Grand Army of Labor:

Workers, Veterans, and the Meaning of the Civil War

By Matthew Stanley

University of Illinois Press, 2021, 320 pages, \$30 paperback.



IN 2005 PAUL Rieckhoff, an Iraq war veteran who co-founded Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) penned a memoir about his military service and involvement in U.S. politics afterwards. He denounced the entire “generation of politicians currently in power” who, in his view, had “failed America’s veterans and the American people.”

Criticizing the shortcomings of both major parties, Rieckhoff argued that “only veterans have the credibility to reach across party lines and represent all Americans.” What the country needed, he argued was a “populist political movement that challenges the status quo in America and propels veterans into Congress for decades to come.”

Events have not played as Rieckhoff hoped or predicted. Veterans of America’s post-9/11 wars who have run for public office, playing up their military credentials, have not generally been a positive force.

Almost all have run as conservative Republicans or corporate Democrats, as part of a concerted effort by both major parties to recruit and finance more so-called “service candidates.” Regardless of their gender or race, most are college-educated former officers with good political connections and affluent donors.

Their efforts to “reach across party lines” have mainly consisted of rubber-stamping ever-bigger Pentagon budgets, backing U.S. military interventions, or favoring privatization of veterans’ healthcare, a bi-partisan project that threatens nine million mainly poor or working-class patients served by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Even after Donald Trump’s 2020 defeat, more than two-thirds of the veterans in Congress are still Republicans; 35 of them

voted against certifying Joe Biden as his successor.

The GOP veterans’ caucus includes such luminaries as Harvard-graduate Tom Cotton, the senator from Arkansas who urged Trump to deploy federal troops during 2020 Black Lives Matters protests and give “no quarter for insurrectionists, anarchists, rioters, and looters.”

On the House side, former Navy SEAL Dan Crenshaw, a critic of “wokeness” in Biden’s Department of Defense, was among 36 veterans and current members of the National Guard or Reserves to vote against expanding eligibility for post-9/11 GI bill benefits to fellow members of the Guard and Reserves.

In his campaign for Congress, Crenshaw’s fellow Texan, Ronny Jackson, Trump’s former White House doctor and a retired Navy admiral, denounced his previous patient Barack Obama as a “Deep State traitor.”

Political Dissenters

When veterans with far better politics or working-class backgrounds run for state or federal office, their handicaps include not having the elite connections which facilitate fund-raising or even the ability to take time off from work to campaign. Choosing to run as third-party candidates puts them at the additional risk of being marginalized in the media, beset by ballot access problems, or denounced as “spoilers.”

In 2020, for example, the Green Party national ticket was composed of two military veterans, Howie Hawkins and Angela Walker. Their low-budget anti-imperialist campaign was largely ignored amid a \$6.6 billion spending war between backers of Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

Two years later, Marine veteran Matthew Hoh, with a distinguished record as a foreign policy critic, has faced similar challenges in his Green Party campaign for an open U.S. Senate seat in North Carolina.

In neighboring Virginia, Lee Carter, a member of Democratic Socialists of America who also served in the Marines, did win election to the state legislature after being inspired by Bernie Sanders. Carter was also motivated by his personal difficulty, as

a blue-collar worker, in qualifying for state workers comp benefits after being injured on the job.

In Richmond, Carter rocked the boat by introducing legislation to raise the minimum wage for airport workers (which passed) and repeal Virginia’s right-to-work law (which did not). In 2021, he waged a long-shot campaign for the Democratic nomination for governor. After placing fifth in a field of five, he lost a primary race to return to the House of Delegates, after which he retired from electoral politics at age 34.

Richard Ojeda, a fiery former Army paratrooper, became a tribune of the working class in West Virginia after he was elected state senator from Logan County. In 2018 he was a leading public supporter of the 25,000 public school teachers who staged a militant statewide walkout.

Later that year he ran for Congress against an incumbent Republican, after winning a primary victory over a centrist Democrat backed by the state party leadership. In the general election, the Democratic National Committee offered little fundraising help because the Ojeda didn’t fit the party’s preferred service candidate profile (despite demonstrating considerable populist appeal to disillusioned former Trump voters, of whom he was one).

In 2018 Kerri Evelyn Harris, an African American community organizer and veteran of the Air Force, challenged Delaware’s incumbent U.S. Senator Tom Carper.

She won 35% of the Democratic primary vote by highlighting Carper’s coziness with the banking industry and vote in favor of the Iraq War. As Harris declared on the campaign trail, “Democrats need to say, ‘This war was our mistake, and we need to fix it.’ We need to say ‘We are going to pull back.’ We need to say . . . we will not go blindly into another conflict that risks our working-class children.”

Grand Army of the Republic

Matthew Stanley’s *Grand Army of Labor* provides a timely reminder that such dissenting voices once had greater resonance. When veterans of a Civil War — that was not a “mistake,” but a necessary crusade against a slave-holding aristocracy — entered U.S. politics in the late 19th century, they were far more ideologically diverse

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and labor oriented than their modern-day counterparts.

As Stanley shows, the largely working-class veterans of Abraham Lincoln's Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) were, for a generation after the Civil War, the nation's largest and most influential voting bloc.

A significant fraction of those ex-"citizen soldiers" strongly supported postwar efforts to challenge the Democrats and Republicans through anti-corporate third-party formations like the Greenback-Labor and People's Parties, and later the Socialist Party of America.

In many Gilded Age battles against "wage slavery," labor radicals appealed to Union army veterans based on their past involvement in the destruction of chattel slavery in the South.

"Agitators framed post-war disputes over land and labor as part of an anti-slavery tradition... Workers built on the praxis of antebellum activists who sought to expand the meaning of freedom—abolitionists, trade unionists, suffragists, land reformers, and utopian socialists—as well as those of rights demanding freedpeople." (18)

As Stanley shows, even some radicalized former recruits to the Confederacy — most famously Albert Parsons, the Haymarket Martyr from Texas who became a leading anarchist in Chicago — played the veteran card in their post-Civil War labor and political organizing. These efforts included courageous but ultimately failed attempts to build inter-racial political coalitions in the South, during Reconstruction and afterwards.

In Stanley's view, the "organized labor factions and individuals who did fight on antiracist terms, attempting to unify the class by challenging rather than promoting gender and racial discrimination, tended to be drowned out, not merely by the interpersonal racism of white workers but also by the dominant ideas regarding race and gender that were broadcast and stoked through every channel of the white capitalist power structure."

In addition, recasting the GAR as a "Grand Army of Labor" became more difficult rhetorically, after 60,000 federal troops were deployed, not to free slaves or defend Reconstruction but to help suppress general strike activity in 1877.

More than a million workers, in ten northern states, participated in this "Great Upheaval," including "tens of thousands of Union veterans on both sides of the barricades." In the aftermath of this conflict, which claimed 100 lives, both Democrats and conservative Republicans backed further use of the U.S. Army and a strengthened National Guard "to forcefully check future worker uprisings in the name of 'domestic security.'"

Nevertheless, as Parsons observed, "the events of 1877 gave a great impulse and

activity to the labor movement all over the United States and, in fact, the whole world."

One political expression of this, three years after the Great Upheaval, was the Greenback-Labor Party (GLP) presidential campaign of James Beard Weaver, a combat veteran and former Union army colonel. It pitted him against two other former soldiers running on the national Democrat and Republican tickets.

According to Stanley, "the ability of ex-Confederates and Unionists, including African-Americans, to bridge wartime divides along class lines became the centerpiece of Weaver's 1880 campaign."

A disaffected Radical Republican, Weaver had previously been elected to Congress, with 12 other GLP members, who similarly favored "a new anti-slavery movement rooted in the material interests and cultural identities of workers and small-scale farmers." Although Weaver won only 3.3% of the popular vote, the GLP's "appeals to interracial politics would influence later farmer-labor campaigns" and its "social and leadership networks would prove integral to the Populist movement of the 1890s."

A New Anti-Slavery Movement

Meanwhile, the Knights of Labor was emerging as another embodiment of what Stanley calls "the worker-veteran refashioning of 'anti-slavery.'" As part of its reform platform, the Knights touted state-run Old Soldiers' Homes as models for social housing needed for non-veterans, of all races, when these "soldiers of construction" were no longer physically able to work.

In 1885 a group of Union and Confederate veterans created the "Blue and Gray of the Knights of Labor." Under the slogan "Capital Divided, Labor Unites Us," their postwar mission was to "re-unite those who were arrayed against each other on the field of battle" but now had a common working-class interest in achieving industrial freedom through labor militancy."

In this fashion, the Knights tried to "craft a sense of brotherhood among old soldiers in support of the eight-hour movement."

In its later campaigning for other social benefits and labor protections, the Socialist Party similarly argued that "soldiers of industry" needed their own system of old age annuities and workers' compensation when they became casualties of dangerous and unhealthy working conditions.

This association of "military veteranhood with industrial veteranhood" was no exaggeration at the turn of the century.

As one socialist noted at the time, "the number of wage earners killed and maimed every year on the railroads, in the mines and factories is approximately equal to the number of soldiers killed and wounded in any one year of our great civil war, with all

its terrible battles."

A hundred years after the Civil War, when the ranks of labor included many veterans of the draft-driven "citizen armies" that waged good wars or bad, from World War II to Vietnam, other former soldiers became catalysts for change in several high-hazard industries.

Among the leaders of the grassroots movement for black lung benefits in West Virginia was Arnold Miller, a disabled miner who was previously injured, as a combat infantryman, during the D-Day landing in 1944.

Miller ran for president of the United Mine Workers in 1972, as part of the Miners for Democracy (MFD) slate that also included Harry Patrick, who served in the Navy during the Korean War.

The MFD's victory over a murderous and corrupt union leadership was propelled in part by the workplace militancy of recently returned Vietnam veterans. Among them was current UMW President Cecil Roberts, who continues to rally union members and their families against a resurgence of lung disease due to coal and silica dust exposure among underground miners.

In the 1970s and '80s the late Tony Mazzocchi, a survivor of the Battle of the Bulge, became a visionary leader of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers (OCAW), who also worked in extremely dangerous jobs.

After battling powerful OCAW employers, Mazzocchi became a key architect of labor's campaign for the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, which now provides workplace protections for 130 million Americans.

Following that historic achievement, Mazzocchi tried, as a founder of the Labor Party in the 1990s, to popularize the now-wide-spread demand for more affordable higher education. Mazzocchi's inspiration for that initiative was the liberating experience of other working-class veterans from his World War II generation, who were able to attend college in the late 1940s as a result of the original GI Bill, which he regarded as "one of the most revolutionary pieces of legislation in the 20th century."

Unfortunately Mazzocchi's late 20th century attempt to build a lasting labor-based political formation, independent of the two major parties, encountered many of the same systemic obstacles faced, but not overcome, by veterans who become third-party backers and political candidates a century before, after their service in the Civil War.

As Matthew Stanley shows, the foot-soldiers in that "Grand Army of Labor" lost many of their initial electoral battles. Yet their pioneering efforts ultimately succeeded, in popularizing the idea that veterans' benefits were a good working model for more expansive social welfare programs benefiting all U.S. workers and their families. ■

REVIEW

Romance, Revolution & a World on Fire By David McNally

Red Round Globe Burning:

A Tale at the Crossroads of Commons and Closure, of Love and Terror, of Race and Class, and of Kate and Ned Despard

By Peter Linebaugh

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019, 486 pages, \$26.95 paperback.

PETER LINEBAUGH'S LATEST work *Red Round Globe Hot Burning*, arrived — as the title might suggest — as if in anticipation of a world in revolt against racist police violence and ecological crisis.

At the center of his text, Linebaugh has written us a love story of sorts. It involves the romance of Edward (Ned) and Catherine (Kate) Despard — the former an Irish revolutionary, the latter a Black woman from Jamaica.

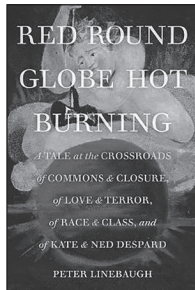
Running through this romance, Linebaugh discloses entangled histories: of the rural poor in England defending common lands; of Haitians overturning slavery; of Irish republicans taking up arms against colonialism; of Indigenous North Americans fighting for their lands; of ecologists documenting the effects of coal, soot, and poisoned air on the laboring poor.

These, Linebaugh instructs, are our predecessors, the trailblazers who fought to free the world of oppression. Edward Despard went to the English gallows in 1803 for his commitment to ending British colonialism in Ireland. Kate organized relentlessly to save him; she wrote his gallows speech with him; and she sought to preserve his — their — legacy after his death.

Now Peter Linebaugh has taken up the work of elaborating that legacy for radicals today. It follows the path of his previous historical studies of popular freedom struggles, which include *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (with Marcus Rediker, Verso 2013), *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Verso 2006), and *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (University of California Press, 2008).

At the heart of the present work, he puts the commons (communally held fields and

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forests that were seized by private landowners in the early phase of capitalist development — ed.) For it is the return to the principles of commoning that we urgently need today.

Yet Linebaugh is wary of some recent returns to the commons that have

lost all sense of the class struggle. We need be wary, he tells us, of a politics of the commons that lacks “any notion of the working class.” (83)

He reminds us that the enclosed field, which cut off the poor from the common lands, was connected to the prison. The latter too often became the residence of those who led anti-enclosure riots, tore down hedges and fences, and reclaimed what had once belonged to all. The struggle for the commons is a serious business, as CLR James might have said, and it carries great responsibilities.

Riotous Histories

We are, in other words, on the terrain of class struggle. And Linebaugh tracks it like a riotous historian, one who embraces not just the commons but also the riots and uprisings that sought to defend it. Careful, however: Let us not assume too quickly that we know what class struggle looks like. Attend to it in all its breadth and diversity. It is a marvelous thing.

Look, Linebaugh says, at the great indigent leader Tecumseh as he implores his followers to “level all distinctions” and “to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land.” (398) Tecumseh’s words are alive; they speak to us of class and commons today.

Listen, he urges, to the last words of Edward Despard, co-written by his wife Kate, as he proclaims that “the principles of freedom, of humanity, and of justice will triumph over falsehood, tyranny, and delusion.” (407)

And read, he implores, the great Thomas Spence as he advocates women’s suffrage, health care for all, public granaries to feed the people, and an end to private property in land. Take inspiration from Spence’s 1795 booklet, *The End of Oppression* and rewrite it for our times.

That is what Peter Linebaugh is doing in this extraordinary work. He is rewriting the

history of capitalism, class struggle, and the commons. He is sharing past resources. He is reviving freedom dreams.

Constellative Method, Disruptive Time

Walter Benjamin once recommended a “constellative” method as most appropriate for historical materialists when writing history. Marxist readings of history should attend to those insurgent, out-of-joint moments in which bourgeois progress could have been disrupted and arrested.

For Benjamin, this materialist approach “brushes history against the grain,” seeking the gaps and fissures in historical time that signaled other possibilities — possibilities that are not yet closed off. Where the bourgeois standpoint flattens historical time into a seamless, linear narrative, one event following inevitably from another, historical materialism by contrast ought to be drenched in disruptive time.

In defiance of linearity, historical materialism should thus constellate moments of popular insurgence across time, connecting flashes of a world being turned upside down. The method requires a jarring and disjointed temporality, one in which discrete moments of rebellion are brought together in a disruptive counter-history.

In addition, this disruptive — indeed eruptive — history must also be anchored in the present-day struggles of the historian. As a result, a non-linear historical materialism brings together “the Then and the Now . . . into a constellation like a flash of lightning.” In so doing it aspires to create not a comprehensive image of history, but an explosively dialectical one.¹

Its methods are experimental and improvisational. However much they may borrow from radical works of art, these methods seek also to recuperate the very praxis of proletarian revolution.²

Walter Benjamin’s dialectical protocols for an eruptive historical materialism have rarely found practitioners equal to the task. Peter Linebaugh is an outstanding exception.

Past and Present

Linebaugh opens Chapter 11 with yet another fragment of disruptive history. He introduces us to an anonymous 1762 letter by a band of Irish Levellers and anti-enclosure rioters, known as Whiteboys, in which they described themselves as “levellers and

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Scholar, Activist and Socialist:

Milton Fisk, 1932-2022

By Patrick Brantlinger & several ATC editors

MILTON FISK, WHO passed away September 8, 2022 shortly after turning 90 years old, was widely known throughout the Midwest as a social justice activist with an emphasis on labor issues. Milton was also an astute intellectual and an exceptional human being who radiated kind energy to all those who knew him. His tall stature and quiet demeanor were a familiar and welcome presence to his Bloomington, Indiana political comrades and friends.

Milton grew up in Lexington, Kentucky as the son of two academics. His mother Lucy was a literature professor; his father was the American modernist painter Edward Fisk. Milton took great pride in his father's art, displaying it in his house and publicly caring for his father's artistic legacy.

After graduating from Notre Dame University, Milton received a PhD in philosophy from Yale, where he was roommates with fellow philosophers Richard Schmitt and Roger Hancock. Schmitt remembers him as a devout Catholic, who never missed Sunday mass during that period.

Later Milton discovered Marxism, for him both an intellectual commitment and a praxis. He taught both at Notre Dame and at Yale, before joining the philosophy department at Indiana University in 1966, where he served as chair for a number of years.

Milton's main philosophical emphasis was on ethics, especially as it related to public affairs, through a Marxist framework. Among his seven books and many articles are *Toward a Healthy Society* and *Ethics and Social Survival*.

Non-academic writings include a pamphlet *Socialism from Below: The Origins of the ISO*, and numerous articles on many topics for *Against the Current* (see <https://againstthecurrent.org/milton-fisk/>).

Besides his distinguished career at IU, he taught as a visiting faculty member at universities in Cuba, Venezuela, and Mexico. He received an honorary degree from Debrecen University in Hungary.

Milton's partner, Doris Jean Burton, with whom he lived since 2005, survives him.

This tribute was written by Patrick Brantlinger, professor emeritus of English at Indiana University, and by Purnima Bose, David Finkel and Ursula McTaggart, members of the ATC editorial board.



Milton Fisk speaking in Venezuela, one of many countries where he traveled to give lectures and offer solidarity.

Milton is also survived by his children: Barth Fisk (Peggy Lepp), and their children Jacob (Sarah Hamang), Adam (Kate Wargel), Rachel, and Kaden; Graham Fisk (Nancy Ash), and their children Ezra and Thea; and Melany Fisk (Rick Ingersoll) and their children Edward and Camille; and stepdaughter Maurenis Ibarra Sosa, the daughter of Milton's late second wife Maritza.

He is also survived by his first wife Ruth (Carroll) Fisk, the mother of his three children, his sister Allie Hendricks of Lexington, Kentucky and her children Chuck and Teresa Hendricks as well as several nieces and nephews.

Social Justice

Milton loved his academic work and remained committed to it even after retiring from IU. For many years afterwards, he maintained a campus office, which was plastered with social justice posters. That social justice work made up the other major thread of Milton's life.

He was engaged with faculty, student, and community issues throughout his life. Generous with his time and attention, Milton sat through endless meetings without demanding to take the floor or position himself as an expert.

He was much beloved among students and colleagues for his work on different university campaigns. Among other social justice

causes, Milton was the main person responsible for establishing an American Federation of Teachers chapter at IU. After 9/11 he was an active member of the Progressive Faculty and Staff Caucus, which for several years organized weekly teach-ins on aspects of foreign and domestic policy.

Milton also played an energetic role in the student anti-sweatshop group No Sweat's successful campaign to convince the administration to join the Worker Rights Consortium. After one Wednesday evening bargaining session with the Dean of Students, he quipped that his wife was going to kill him for prioritizing the student anti-sweatshop campaign over a romantic Valentine's Day dinner at home.

With a wry chuckle, he added that the No Sweat campaign was the first success he had experienced in his long career as an activist. Fortunately other successes followed, including the effort to halt an initiative to privatize Bloomington's water supply.

Whenever there was a labor strike in the vicinity, Milton would try to join the picket line. He established and led a Jobs with Justice chapter in southern Indiana. He campaigned against the Indiana legislature's "right to work" law.

Milton was a leader in Bloomington's Living Wage Campaign, which succeeded in passing an ordinance through Bloomington City Council in 2006. This years-long campaign had long-range impacts on Bloomington workers, as it adjusts annually for inflation (and is set for 2022 at \$14.01/hour).

Building on the success of the Living Wage Campaign, Milton then became active in Hoosiers for a Common Sense Health Care Plan, which advocated for a single-payer health care system statewide. It was a passionate commitment for him.

Teacher and Supporter

Even as an elder with decades of movement experience, he always made time to listen respectfully and energetically to young scholars and activists, having them over to his house for dinner, reading and commenting on their work, and supporting them kindly and patiently, whether it meant showing up to an event they'd organized or gathering wider support for a cause from his

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Remembering Tim Schermerhorn By Marsha Niemeijer

TIM SCHERMERHORN DIED September 11, 2022 at age 68. He was the son of a subway worker and in the words of one Daily News article, “entered the family business” where he became a powerful leader in the rank and file transit workers’ upsurge. Survivors include his wife Kay Schermerhorn, stepdaughter Alicia Archer, and grandson Jason Archer, age 4, who’s been described as “Tim’s heart” over these recent years. — The Editors

KAY ASKED ME to speak about Tim’s labor activism and class activism. Let me try to share some of his work with you — work that was so often done together with Kay, always together, side by side.

I have been so incredibly lucky to share a political path with Tim, as a fellow socialist comrade. I was in the same socialist organization as Tim and Kay. Tim and I were on the board of *Labor Notes* together for many years, and Tim wrote for *Labor Notes* and helped organize our conferences. We crossed paths in New York City from the moment I moved here in 2002. Tim and Kay became my teachers, as I am not from the United States and had much to learn.

And most importantly, Tim and I, and many of you here, agreed that the task of socialists in the labor movement is to be of the labor movement, as rank and filers and union activists, and to fight for, and with, the working class as a whole, on the job, but also in society outside of work. And Tim believed in the power of workers to reclaim better lives, where fights against the boss should spill into the streets and help shift the balance of power in our favor, against the billionaires and their political cronies.

When I started reflecting on his work, and talking to others who knew Tim, I realized how much he truly did. I knew Tim to be a force of nature, in how he smiled and laughed, his big heartedness and his storytelling, his sheer joy for righteous troublemaking, and his commitment to Black liberation — but to have done all that Tim did in his life, well, that takes someone so special that “force of nature” doesn’t even begin to describe it. It made me feel an even greater loss, the loss we all feel, knowing fully

Marsha Niemeijer, speaking on behalf of Labor Notes, gave this tribute at Tim Schermerhorn’s memorial, September 24, 2022.



New Directions leaders (from left): Steve Downs, Tim Schermerhorn and Corine Scott-Mack.

who Tim was and all that Tim did.

I know the transit workers here will say so much about Tim’s Local 100 contributions, so I’ll just share how that work inspired the rest of us. Tim’s favorite activity was organizing slowdowns and other rank and file actions in order to show management who really controls the MTA. His storytelling about those fights showed Tim’s passion for troublemaking with others. His eyes would be lit up, his laugh there, and you couldn’t help but want to take part in winning power too. It’s no surprise that Tim was the recipient of the 1st Troublemakers Award handed out by *Labor Notes* in 1997, for his devotion

to the rank and file within Local 100.

Tim was committed to training and mentoring his coworkers to learn how to use that power, and how to be the best troublemakers around. He continued mentoring transit workers after 2014 when he was fighting the MTA to come back to work after an extended leave. He was involved in the stewards’ program, which he thought was the best thing going for the local. He said he was putting renegades in the field.

But his mentoring extended way beyond the local. During the 2012 Chicago Teachers strike, Tim was mentoring a younger member, Alicia Love, who was in the Black Rank

For Rank and File Power By Steve Downs

FOR ALMOST 20 years, Tim Schermerhorn was at the center of an effort by NYC transit workers to resist speed-up and harassment from management and to reform their union, Transport Workers Union Local 100, so that it would be more aggressively fighting for its members on the job and against racism both on the job and in the city more broadly.

Tim fought for a union led by its members, one where they would use direct action on the job to limit management’s power. He organized his co-workers to strictly follow the operating rules and use their collective power in fights with management. He took pride in “never giving the Transit Authority an on time train.”

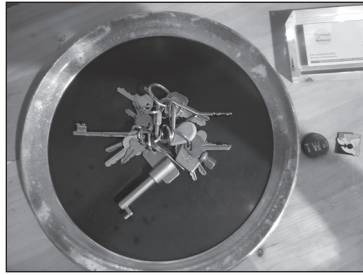
He ran for Local president several times and was elected Vice President for the subway crews in 2000 when the reform group he had helped build from fewer than 20 members, New Directions, won control of the Local of over 35,000. He voted against the tentative contract agreement the new reform president negotiated in 2002 and returned to the road, which he much preferred over being a full-time officer, when his term was up a year later.

[Steve Downs’ tribute “Rest in Power, Tim Schermerhorn” appears on the *Labor Notes* website and reposted at <https://solidarity-us.org/rest-in-power-tim-schermerhorn-leader-of-new-york-subway-union-reform-effort/>.] ■

and File Exchange, a national network which Tim helped lead and build. He reported that she was giving him strike reports that were as good as anyone in leadership could give.

He was ever mindful of the need to mentor young Black workers and community leaders such as those connected with Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi. Some of those activists and young leaders had been in labor. He reported, "They went in by themselves and with not enough training. I'll stay close, helping them with their internal development and education, but also in terms of their outreach to local workers. In the southern African-American tradition with high respect for elders, I'm their movement elder."

And he never stopped mentoring. He was mentoring an IATSE member in New York and just a few weeks before he died, he was looking to connect with a recently hired Black staffer at *Labor Notes*.



Tim's train keys, nearly sacred to train operators.

Never Slowing Down

Tim understood and wrote that "labor can make big steps forward when Black workers are in motion in their communities, because Black workers don't protest in the streets while keeping quiet at work." The nationwide summer of uprising in 2020 to protest the brutal murder of George Floyd made Tim hopeful there was a path — a challenging one — to bring that militancy and energy into the workplace.

After he left transit he gave classes on W. E. B. Dubois' book *Black Reconstruction* at the Brecht Forum, mostly to young Black workers from all kinds of unions in New York. He was active in the Black Rank and File Exchange, which he helped found in 1984. The Exchange agreed that having Black leaders of unions is not enough if they aren't responsive to the needs of the members.

Romance.... — cont. from page 41

avengers for the wrongs done to the poor." (121) In this fragment of resistance he finds a history of struggle for the commons.

Heed these rebels, remember them, and draw inspiration from them, urges Linebaugh. The wrongs done to the poor are yet to be avenged and reversed. Those wrongs include what was done to Kate and Ned Despard and to all their radical contemporaries. We have yet to settle our debts to them. ■

Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), Convolute N, 50.
2. In a similar vein see Terry Eagleton, "Lenin and the Postmodern Age" in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, ed. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 42-58..

At their 1988 conference Tim said, "The real leaders are in the ranks, the ones organizing rebellions from the bottom up and empowering the Black rank and file."

And he was planning against all odds to be at the June *Labor Notes* Conference. In one conference after another he took responsibility for pulling together Black Worker Network meetings. He maintained an extensive network throughout the country of Black workers and projects such as the Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina.

He was proud of sticking with this work for so long, through the ups and downs, and

was excited to see Black workers playing such an important role in the current upsurge in labor militancy. He told LN, "when you keep at something, suddenly it becomes more of a project."

Of course, we all know that illness was not going to slow Tim

down. I spoke with his home dialysis nurse, Teresa, a few days ago, as she's a member of the nurses' union where my partner David and I both work.

She knew Tim well, and told me he had nine lives because he rallied back each time he got sick. Teresa and David recalled how Tim got involved, this time as a patient, in the contract fight against Fresenius, the dialysis provider where Teresa works.

Tim just could not stop organizing, wherever he was. Fresenius is notoriously horrific and profits dearly at the expense of so many who suffer from kidney failure, most of them people of color. When David was working on a Fresenius contract fight in 2017, Tim readily agreed to speak at rallies from the perspective of a patient. Teresa told me his presence made a difference, and meant a lot to the nurses.

Milton Fisk, 1932-2022 — continued from page 42

own movement connections.

A skilled carpenter, among his other talents, Milton was a rare individual who could travel to Nicaragua both to present university lectures and to build houses. In addition to Nicaragua, he made frequent trips to Santa Clara, Cuba, as part of Bloomington's sister city delegations. With other comrades, he participated in the 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

Well into old age, Milton was healthy and active. A lover of the outdoors, in his youth Milton enjoyed mountain climbing in the Rockies and the Swiss Alps. He also owned a piece of wooded property not far from Bloomington where he built a cabin and

Tim loved deriding the dictatorship of bankers, and spoke clearly about neoliberalism and austerity politics and the effects that social cuts had on everyone, but especially Black workers and workers of color.

He was building the labor movement we need, and don't often have, to fight this capitalist system. When Ed Koch, former mayor of New York and the bankers' cheerleader, died in 2013 Tim dared write an anti-obituary in *Labor Notes*. He said that labor could only have a lasting success in beating back austerity if it could go beyond single struggles — one firehouse, one hospital, one contract at a time.

Tim fought for all of us. I'm poorly paraphrasing W.E.B. Dubois, but Tim understood that it's only when the white working class realizes that they too are harmed by the system of racist oppression that the end of capitalism will be in sight.

Tim leaves a tremendous legacy thanks to his life's devotion to class politics. This final quote from Tim's extensive writing and speaking, in *Labor Notes* and at our conferences, sums up well his legacy and vision. In April 2020 he wrote:

"Disasters, whether natural or man-made, are watershed periods of class struggle and are essential to class resistance. The employer class seizes the opportunity to take back hard-won gains from years of workers' struggle.

"We are now faced with dual disasters, a global pandemic amidst a major economic downturn. This is a test of our militancy and our solidarity. If we have but a few islands of heroic fight back in workplaces and communities, while capital is organized as a class, we will lose. Solidarity and resistance are our alternatives and we have our best tools in our hands. Electoral change would come far too late in the coming offensive. If you have a small activist core and a modest project, now is the time to organize."

As our friend Ricardo Levins-Morales wrote when we heard the news, "Hermano, you will be missed. But rest easy, man. We'll take it from here." ■

often gave friends wildflower tours.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Milton was an active member of the International Socialists and then the International Socialist Organization. Open with his time and knowledge, he recruited a good number of students to revolutionary socialist politics and organization.

He joined Solidarity at the time of its founding in 1986 and continued to contribute generously after he'd decided that he could no longer actively participate. Committed activist, unapologetic Marxist, and comrade to the world, Milton will be missed. Without Milton the Left will be a duller place. ■

solidarity-with-ukraines-people-no-to-nato-now-or-ever/).

There is indeed a danger of the war growing to an inter-imperialist conflict — *particularly if Russia's invasion is protracted. The longer it takes Ukraine to defeat the invasion, the greater the danger that the war might escalate and expand.* That's especially true as Putin's moves to annex occupied territory, under the obscene pretext of fake "referendums" that no one takes seriously, make any prospect of negotiations even more distant.

It's profoundly mistaken, however, to elevate this potential danger to a primary immediate one — and even worse when leftists do so for essentially ideological reasons to rationalize abstention from supporting Ukraine.

Why? Critically, both NATO and Russian militaries have made clear — for reasons of their own interests — that they have no intention of escalating to direct confrontation. Biden will not supply Ukraine with artillery capable of striking inside Russia. As for Putin's purported threat to use nuclear weapons, that's meaningful more as a terrorist bluff than a serious military option. (Today's satellite-guided weapons of mass murder by precision artillery, high-tech drone strikes and the like make "tactical battlefield nukes" a blunt rather than efficient option.)

The argument that NATO expansion "provoked" the Russian invasion fails on critical examination. As unjustified and triumphalist as it was, NATO's expansion to strategic states of eastern Europe was substantially completed more than a decade ago, including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (2004), Albania and Croatia (2009). The additions of Montenegro (2017) and North Macedonia (2020) are hardly game-changers.

All this certainly contributed to the ascendance of Putin's sinister Great-Russian revanchism, but cannot be said to have "provoked," let alone justified, his assertions in 2021 that Ukraine "is not a real country" and that its people need to be incorporated (subjugated) under Russian rule.

Supposedly, Russia was also provoked by a 2008 promise of Ukraine itself joining NATO, a reckless and frankly stupid U.S.-inspired project — but the Russian regime surely understood that any such action would be vetoed by Germany (and after 2014 Ukraine was not eligible under NATO's own rules when it didn't control its territory of Crimea).

Any prospect of Ukraine joining NATO is the kind of issue that could have been resolved by a combination of diplomatic and semi-secret agreements. It's much harder now with the outbreak of war where Ukraine's very existence is at stake.

Some on the left, for example the editors of *Monthly Review*, have argued at length that the Ukraine war is the culmination of longstanding U.S. intentions to cripple and then fragment Russia itself. Whatever the historical backdrop of such imperialist ambitions, the fact is that the United States and NATO did *not* supply advanced weapons to Ukraine in advance of the invasion.

Indeed, even though U.S. intelligence accurately predicted the invasion, Washington and other western capitals expected a Russian victory within days with the rapid fall of Kyiv and all of eastern Ukraine. Only the success of Ukraine's resistance, and the clear refusal of its population to tolerate any consideration of surrender, prompted the

West to undertake massive arms supply and ramp up vital intelligence support of Ukraine's military.

It's understandable that those who don't or can't recognize the centrality of Ukraine's resistance and popular mobilization can only view this as a Western-inspired "proxy war." The blind reduction of *Ukraine and its people to pawns on the great-power chessboard is a fatal obstacle for efforts to build a peace or anti-imperialist movement worthy of the name.*

Against "Campism" and All Imperialism

There are even worse, pro-Russian so-called "campist" left voices who claim to see something "anti-imperialist" in Russia's drive to stamp out Ukrainian independence and national existence, including the grotesquely misnamed United National Antiwar Coalition. (UNAC has held webinars featuring a former nuclear weapons inspector Scott Ritter, issuing half-deranged declarations that Russian triumph is inevitable and that Ukraine deserves to be destroyed.)

Support of Russia in this war is an absolute betrayal of basic democratic principle, without which any posturing about socialism is empty noise.

At the same time, we are well aware of all manner of bitter reactionary consequences of this war. These are gifts provided by Putin, free of charge, to western imperialism and the weapons industry.

The suppression of women's rights and the erosion of democracy in Poland are forgotten as that country becomes a U.S.-backed pillar of NATO's strategic rearming. Palestine and its people are collateral damage, as happens in almost every international crisis — as the Israeli army's near-daily murder of Palestinian young people and the destruction of occupied neighborhoods proceeds with minimal media attention.

The Russian regime's ideological claim that "Ukraine was never a real country" strikingly parallels the longstanding Zionist argument that "there was never a Palestinian nation or state" — in each case, justifying colonialism and annexation. More than 30,000 Ukrainian and Russian refugees have fled to Israel while Palestinians remain stateless in their own occupied homeland, or in exile.

At the same time, the threat of starvation in the Horn of Africa brought on by drought and climate change, as well as skyrocketing food prices in much of the Middle East and Asia, are exacerbated by the interruption of critical grain shipments from Ukraine and Russian fertilizer exports.

What will happen in the coming ominous winter months is an open question. We note that at the time when "Support Ukrainian Resistance and Disempower Fossil Capital" was written, the authors saw signs that economic and fuel supply pressures in Europe might be leading western countries to push Ukraine toward surrender.

With recent Ukrainian advances and the brutal hardening of Putin's stance — and the unknown consequences of Russia's internal crises — that now appears less likely, but it's important to understand that imperialism is infinitely treacherous and the twists and turns of policy are not necessarily predictable.

We do know that the rising stakes, as well as casualties and the scale of destruction, make clarity about this war all the more critical for any authentic socialist and anti-imperialist politics. ■

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