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This PDF was created on June 28, 2013 and corrects a few errata.
What is Communist Voice?

*Communist Voice* is a theoretical journal which not only exposes the capitalist system, but deals with the tragedy that has befallen the revolutionary movement. It confronts the thorny questions and controversies facing progressive activists today, and holds that the crisis of the working class movement can only be overcome if Marxist theory again enlightens the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed. The liberating ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been twisted beyond recognition, not only by outright capitalist spokespeople, but also by the false “communist” regimes of China, Cuba and others today, and of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday. *Communist Voice* denounces these distortions (revisions) of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism — whether Stalinism or Trotskyism or reformism — and stands for placing revolutionary theory on a solid basis through the criticism of revisionism and by analyzing the new developments in the basic economic and political structure of the world today. Through this work, the *Communist Voice* seeks to pave the way for communism to once again become the red, fighting banner of the revolutionary working class movement. Only the influence of the real communist theory can help the goal of a classless, communist society again spread among the workers and oppressed here and around the globe. Only the spread of anti-revisionist Marxism can overcome the influence of liberal, reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist trends and allow the struggle against capitalism to break out in full force.

The revolutionary parties and movements of the working class in the 19th and 20th centuries never achieved their full goals. The working masses fought monarchy, fascism, colonialism, and various capitalist classes, and also made their first attempts to establish a new social system — however these attempts never went beyond the first steps. This class struggle will be renewed in the 21st century, as the masses are faced with how to escape from the escalating misery brought by capitalist development around the world. To hasten the day of the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-liberal and reformist ideologies that are dominant today. It holds that progressive work today requires more than opposing the ultra-conservatives and more than trying to reform the marketplace. It means helping reorganize the working class movement on a basis independent of the liberals and reformists as well as the conservatives. The *CV* sees its theoretical tasks as helping to clear the way for a future reorganization of the working class into, first and foremost, its own political party, as well as other organizations that truly uphold proletarian class interests.

*Communist Voice* thus continues the Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist cause to which its predecessor, the *Workers’ Advocate*, was dedicated. For a quarter of a century, the *Workers’ Advocate* was the paper of a series of activist organizations, the last one being the Marxist-Leninist Party. The demoralization of the revolutionary ranks included the dissolution of the MLP and, along with it, the *Workers’ Advocate*. But the *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more emphasis on theoretical work, the struggle of the *Workers’ Advocate* to contribute to the development of a mass communist party.

The *Communist Voice* is published by the *Communist Voice Organization*, which links together members in a few cities. The CVO calls on all activists who want to fight capitalism in all its guises to join with us in opposing all the bankrupt theories and practices of the past — from Western-style capitalism to Stalinist state capitalism, from reformism to anarchism, from reliance on the pro-capitalist trade union bigwigs to “left” communist sectarianism toward “impure” struggles. It is time to lay the basis for the revolutionary communism of the future by revitalizing the communist theory and practice of today. Only when communism spreads among the millions and millions of oppressed can the struggle against capitalism again become a force that shakes the world!

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Congress barely avoided the “fiscal cliff” threatened for January 2 but across the board federal budget cuts began on March 1. This is so-called “sequestration”. A few programs are exempt, but most social programs are being cut, and this affects state programs as well. Coming in the midst of the ongoing depression, this is causing painful hardship for the poorest and must vulnerable people. At the same time, budget shuffling is being used to preserve programs that also affect the bourgeoisie, such as federal support for air travel. These cuts are not being carried out due to lack of resources, but as part of a bourgeois plan to impose austerity and “entitlement cutbacks”. The January 13 meeting of the Detroit Workers’ Voice discussed the background to the plan that gave rise to sequestration, and what should be done about it.

From the invitation to the meeting about the fiscal cliff

Join us this Sunday, January 13, 2013 to discuss the fiscal cliff, and how it is being used to impose austerity and “entitlement reform”.

The capitalist economic crisis has given rise to political crisis in Congress, which in turn threatens to deepen the ongoing economic crisis. Congress can’t agree on the federal budget, and it set a deadline to make some decisions by the end of 2012. If no agreement was to be had, a series of major cuts in government programs combined with heavy increases in taxes on everyone were to have taken place automatically on January 2. All these steps together would have constituted the so-called fiscal cliff; going over this cliff would threaten to throw the economy even deeper into depression than it already is, and to make life harder for millions upon millions of people.

In a last-minute vote on January 1, Congress postponed the crisis with a series of half measures. As a result, the threat remains of imminent major cuts in government services and deep disruption in the economy:

• The government will reach the limit of its authorized debt in late February or early March. If the debt limit isn’t raised, then the government will begin to default on its obligations and shut down some of its services.
• There is the threat of so-called “sequestration” on March 1 — “sequestration” being a fancy term meaning automatic budget cuts. This is because the Congressional deal of January 1 didn’t actually end the threat of across-the-board cutbacks in government programs, but just postponed it for two months.
• Congress having failed to approve an ordinary federal budget for the current fiscal year, government spending is currently authorized by the “Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2013” of September 2012. The authority granted by this resolution runs out on March 27. If there is no new budget or
continuing resolution by then, government services start to shut down.

So the threat of a new economic disaster continues. And with this threat, the ruling class and its politicians continue the demand that the pensions and health care and living standards of the working class should be cut. This is the so-called “entitlement reform”. It is what was proposed by the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles Commission of 2010. And the next year, in the bipartisan Budget Control Act of 2011, Congress embraced the idea of a fiscal cliff as a way to give itself a deadline for “entitlement reform”, and that deadline was January 1, 2013. Now “reform” sounds nice, as if the intention were to improve the government programs that provide needed services to the people. Actually, “entitlement reform” means cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other needed programs; it’s as if a band of assassins described their business as “longevity reform”.

But is it true that there aren’t the resources to provide health care, pensions, relief for the poor, and schooling for the youth? Is it true that the working people, who grow the food, teach the children, nurse the sick, and staff the factories and stores and offices of this country have been living too high on the hog?

Not at all! Both total production and per worker productivity in the US has increased dramatically over the last few decades. It should be easier than ever, not harder, to provide the needed benefits. And how dare Congress and the economists and the politicians pretend that there is a shortage of resources while millions of people are begging for jobs and the chance to produce more! No, the problem is that the capitalists have been monopolizing the resources, giving more and more of the national income to a relative handful of executives, managers, bankers, and parasites at the top. Inequality has been growing rapidly. It has reached the point that the richest 400 moneyed aristocrats in this country have a net worth of $1.7 trillion: this means that a mere 400 people have wealth equal to one-eighth the gross domestic product of this entire country of over 300 million people. Last year alone the wealth of these 400 grew by 13%. Now, how can their wealth continue to grow by leaps and bounds except by taking away the resources of the majority of the population?

The economic crisis isn’t the result of excessive “entitlements”, but of the capitalist business cycle. The threat of the fiscal cliff shows that the capitalists have no idea what to do about the ongoing depression except make it worse. The problems facing the social programs are largely the result of several decades of market-fundamentalism, with its program of privatization, deregulation, wage and benefit-cutting, and shifting the expense for everything onto the working class, but these programs are to be cut in the name of economic necessity. The meeting on Sunday will discuss the threat of the fiscal cliff, “entitlement reform”, and deeper depression, and what to do about it.

On the continuing threat of the fiscal cliff, and what to do about it

Based on a talk by Joseph Green at the Detroit Workers’ Voice Discussion Group meeting of January 13, 2013.

Today I will talk about the so-called fiscal cliff that was threatened for the beginning of this year.

I’ll try to avoid a lot of the technical details about the myriad of different programs affected by the cuts, and look instead at the big picture about what’s going on. What’s going on is that we’re in the middle of a depression that is lasting for years, and in which no end is in sight. People have lost homes, jobs, seen their wages cut if they still have a job, and — especially in Detroit and Hamtramck and other poor cities — seen one house after another simply torn down. But the fiscal cliff is another type of problem. This is a government crisis. Instead of dealing with the problems of the working people, Congress and the President had developed a deadline for coming to an agreement on, not helping people survive the crisis, but cutbacks to government programs, or else there would be a dramatic rise in taxes and across-the-board cutting of many government programs at the beginning of this year. This deadline has now been postponed by a last-minute congressional agreement on January 1, but we still face additional deadlines in the next two months. In late February or early March, the federal debt limit will be reached, and if there is no agreement, the federal government has to start drastic cutbacks. And on March 27, the temporary authority for federal spending lapses altogether. So if there is no agreement, well, there’s the threat of a federal shutdown.

What is this all about? First I will deal with the creation of the threat of the fiscal cliff, in part as a conscious plan to enforce cutbacks and austerity. Then I will deal with that the fiscal cliff also shows that we are in a period of crisis, in which the masses are suffering, but also the political parties can’t come to an agreement, and have no idea of how to get out of the depression, and not much of a plan except to just keep squeezing the working people. Then I will deal with whether this austerity, or squeezing of the working class, is really necessary — is it really true that there aren’t the resources to provide for people. And then I will discuss what we should do about it, because we can’t rely on the Democrats or Republicans, the parties which have brought us to the fiscal cliff.

The search for political cover for cutting social programs

To begin with, the roots of the fiscal cliff go back to 2010, when President Obama appointed the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles Commission, officially known as the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. The point of this commission was to give political cover to the politicians to cut Social Security, Medicare, and other so-called “entitlements”. Neither Democrats or the Republicans wanted to take the outright responsibility for it. But it was the logical next step in the program of market-fundamentalism that had been pursued for
years, both by the Republican administrations of Reagan and the Bushes, and the Democratic administrations of Clinton and Obama. Market fundamentalism is a program of privatization, of cutting back on social services, of eliminating “welfare are we know it”, and of ensuring that the remaining government services were run by contracting them out to private firms. The pretext for further cutbacks is dealing with the federal deficit. It isn’t that US government expenditures are out of line with what one would expect in a major industrial country, but that market fundamentalism has led to the view that the government revenue should be held down. In particular, taxes on corporations have been repeatedly cut, so that some of the richest corporations pay nothing in income tax, taxes on rich individuals have been repeatedly cut, and the tax burden shifted to the rest of the population, which has the least ability to pay. This helps create a deficit, and some of this was done intentionally with the idea that having a deficit would create pressure to cut government social programs. The idea of the Simpson-Bowles Commission was that market fundamentalism is sacred, and the deficit should be used as an excuse to cut major “entitlements”, that is, social services like Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.

The Simpson-Bowles Commission was supposed to pass its recommendations by a super-majority, so these recommendations could then serve as political cover for Congress to immediately make cutbacks. But the Commission’s Report didn’t get a supermajority, so the plan didn’t work out, although the Commission’s recommendations have been cited ever since as being supposedly what the country needs.

This leads us to the Budget Control Act of 2011, which established the bipartisan Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, the so-called “supercommittee”, to take up where Simpson-Bowles left off. The Act was passed during a crisis over raising the federal debt ceiling. In fact it is a deal to raise the federal debt limit. But the limit was raised only a little bit, ensuring that there would be more debt limit crises fairly soon — just as the January 1 deal this year ensures that another debt limit crisis will come within two months.

Now, the Budget Control Act specified that the “supercommittee” should come to an agreement, and, in line with the supercommittee’s recommendations, Congress should pass a plan to make cutbacks of sufficient size, or else there would be across-the-board cutbacks as of January 2 this year. These automatic cutbacks were not supposed to apply to certain programs such as Social Security, so those who voted for the Budget Control Act wouldn’t have to say they had voted for such cuts. But the intent was the “supercommittee” would prepare a plan that did include such cutbacks, and the idea was that when the supercommittee made its recommendations, then Congress as a whole would have cover to vote for cutbacks on Social Security and other social programs.

But the “supercommittee” failed to reach agreement, and this helped set up the threat of a fiscal cliff. As of January 2, unless Congress acted, there was to be across-the-board cuts in most programs. Moreover, a series of other things, such as the Bush tax cuts, also were to expire — if there was no Congressional action — at the end of last year. So as of January 1st and 2nd, a series of major tax increases and government program cuts would start to take place. This would be a major drag on the economy and threaten to bring a sharp downturn; it would also cut military spending, which would horrify those conservatives who might not otherwise mind a government shutdown; it would increase taxes on everyone; and so forth. Indeed, the federal debt ceiling was also reached again at the end of last year, and failure for Congress to increase it would it would by itself start a government shutdown.

In the last-minute negotiations, President Obama and the Congressional democrats felt buoyed up by the election results, and made a show of being in a more of a fighting mood than usual. So let’s see what happened. Some things were dealt with. But overall, the crisis was simply postponed, and not for very long. The debt ceiling was raised so little that there will be another fight in a couple of months. The Bush tax cuts were rescinded only for individuals with income above $400,000 (or couples with joint income above $450,000), rather than those with income above $250,000 as Obama originally proposed. But this still leaves the tax rates of the very rich at historically low levels. At the same time, taxes were increased on all workers. Part of the Obama stimulus plan included a reduction in the payroll taxes withheld from checks for Social Security and Medicare. This is rescinded, so all workers will see 2% more of their pay withheld immediately.

But the main point is that there was no overall agreement on the budget. The crisis started by the threat of the fiscal cliff remains. And the atmosphere of crisis will be still be used to provide political cover for the parties to cut Social Security, Medicare, and other programs, both by cutting the premiums and increasing the enrollment age.

A real split between two miserable alternatives

Nevertheless, the fiscal cliff and these deadlocked budget negotiations aren’t simply a plot to reduce entitlements. They also show that the economic depression has brought a crisis that not only affects the masses, but has divided the bourgeois politicians. They are split on what to do. This isn’t a split between good and bad, but between two miserable alternatives, but it is still a split. This isn’t a split over whether to keep privatizing public services, cutting union protections for teachers and others, and giving more and more subsidies to business. Both Democrats and Republicans agree on this market fundamentalist course. But it is a difference that shows that neither Democrat or Republican has a way out of the depression and the suffering it is causing.

The conservatives, both the Tea Party and the moderates, agree on austerity for the working masses. They insist that lower taxes for the rich, less regulation, and less social programs are the answer for the depression. This is the same program that is being carried out in one country in Europe after another with devastating results — when the economy starts to go down, precisely at the moment when the masses need social programs the most, the governments cut back on social programs. The bourgeoisie is using the crisis in Europe as an opportunity to cut wages, working conditions, and social programs, and the result is that the economy gets worse, unemployment gets higher, reaching 25% or beyond in some countries, government deficits get worse, and then the bourgeoisie, and the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union’s banks, demand more austerity. The conservatives here want the
same program.

The Democratic liberals want the same basic program, but with milder cuts to the social programs, and perhaps with a federal stimulus. Obama had a small stimulus at the beginning of the recession, and wanted another one in the negotiations at the end of this last year. The stimulus is based on the idea that if the government puts more money into the economy during slowdowns, it will spur the economy; and then if the economy ever starts to overheat, one slows the economy down by cutting spending and increasing taxes. In fact, until recently, this idea was held by conservatives as well, perhaps in a slightly different form — they hold that tax cuts on business and millionaires are the preferable stimulus.

Now, one might ask, how can the Democrats back both entitlement reform, which means cutbacks on necessary programs like Medicare and Social Security, and having a stimulus? Well, that’s a sign that their program is half-hearted and deceptive at best. It’s not going to go very far. But it’s what the Obama administration and various politicians are doing. They cut from the programs that they boast of saving, and they claim that their cuts don’t really hurt recipients. Or they say that raising the retirement age isn’t really a cut, because it will let those currently on Social Security stay there. Or they say they aren’t cutting the benefits, they’re supposedly just changing how the adjustment for inflation is made. Meanwhile they tell the masses to have faith that, if the stimulus helps the economy, then jobs and benefits will trickle down to the workers.

It can also be recalled that Obama’s stimulus program was itself carried out in a market-fundamentalist way. The auto bailout was accompanied by cutting the wages of new hires in auto in half. The attack on teachers’ unions continued. The health care plan preserves the role of the big medical insurers, and devised in consultation with them.

So we have the Democrats and Republicans in bitter conflict, but neither of them has a program that can either bring the country out of the depression or shield the masses from the growing misery. They both still agree with market fundamentalism. The Tea Party program may lead to disaster faster, but the Democrats will continue the water torture of the working class. The disagreements between the two parties does, however, reflect the state of mind of the capitalist ruling class which is the real base of both parties. The ruling class is concerned by the depth of the crisis, but it doesn’t see the need to do anything but step up its pressure on the working class.

**The song and dance about the unfunded liability**

The bourgeois economists, the talking heads on the news, and the supposedly responsible politicians who fill up the chairs of supercommittees and Simpson-Bowles-type commissions, all assure us, however, that the problem is that the people of this country have lived beyond our means. We supposedly have to have austerity and cutbacks, because there is no money to feed us, clothe us, provide pensions in old age, and so forth.

For example, some capitalist economists say that presently there is an unfunded $45 trillion dollar shortfall in the backing for Social Security and Medicare. $45 trillion is three times the size of the entire economy, the GDP (gross domestic product) being about $15 trillion. If the government really needed $45 trillion more to fund these programs, then they are unaffordable. But if that were so, then how could the workers afford to retire or imagine that they would have medical care when aged? How could this cost be transferred to the workers themselves? Surely it is ridiculous to assume that the working class has private savings of $45 trillion that could be tapped. So what these economists are really arguing, but won’t openly say, is that workers should simply have the good grace to die after they retire.

But let’s look a little more closely. The question, from the point of view of the working class, not the economists, is whether there are the resources in this country to provide pensions and health care for the aged, and indeed health care for everyone, and schooling for children, and housing. And indeed, we have an excess of houses, not a shortage. We have sufficient food and clothes and goods to feed and clothe and provide a good life for everyone in the country. And if we had a shortage, hey, we have 12 million unemployed workers, plus millions more part-time workers who want full-time jobs. If there really was a shortage, why are so many workers and youth unemployed? Why can’t we simply go to work and produce what’s needed?

**It’s not a shortage of resources**

There is no shortage of resources. What there is, is an economic system, capitalism, based on inequality and exploitation, where the capitalists are never reconciled to seeing the workers having any security. They want workers to be as insecure as possible, so they can be forced to work at the lowest wages and the worst conditions.

There is no shortage of resources; there isn’t even really a financial crisis for such programs as Social Security and Medicare. Until recently, the federal government has been financing other programs through borrowing money taxed for the purpose of Social Security and Medicare. And with minor changes in the financing for these programs, they would remain solvent as far as one can see.

But if there were a financial shortfall, it would be because capitalism is unable to allocate fairly the resources that exist. If there were a financial shortfall for these programs, at a time when workers are producing abundant goods, it would be the most clear sign that it’s time for capitalism to go. It would mean that the workers produce abundant goods, but that capitalism can’t even set aside a proper amount for their livelihood. And that’s in fact what’s happening.

If there really were a financial shortfall, it would be a devastating verdict on the lies of the economists who told us for decades that market reforms, and bigger and bigger banks, and fancier financial products like derivatives, would allocate the economy’s resources so much better, ensuring financing for the best projects, and providing higher growth. What could be a greater condemnation, both of capitalism in general and of bourgeois economists in particular, then that after several decades of this supposed higher efficiency in allocating resources, there isn’t money for pensions and health care and schooling.

The capitalists says that, hey, there are fewer active workers for each retiree than in the past. And that’s true. But they forget
to add that active workers are far more productive than in the past, and that while wages may have been stagnant for the last several decades, even before the wage-cutting during the present depression, for year after year productivity has steadily increased. And this increase in productivity has exceeded what’s needed to make up for the fact that the population is aging.

So when the two parties say that “entitlement reform” is necessary, they’re simply parroting the lies which sound good to the ears of the bourgeoisie. And they put emphasis on austerity plus, maybe, a stimulus, because they are fully committed to the program of market fundamentalism, sometimes called the “Washington consensus”, because it is held not only by American politicians and capitalists, but by the world financial agencies with their headquarters in Washington.

What to do about it

This brings us to the question of what then we should do, if neither of the two parties is on our side? Well, we need a program to protect ourselves from the ravages of the depression. No one can devise a program that will keep capitalism from having crises and depressions — they’re inherent in the anarchic, dog-eat-dog system of capitalism. But one can have a program to defend the masses from their worst consequences.

We need to demand, not “entitlement reform”, but programs for the direct relief of the millions of distressed people. It’s a fraud when the politicians say that programs to give subsidies to business are “jobs programs”; that’s trickle-down economics. We need better relief for those who are unemployed: it is an inhuman scandal how few are covered by unemployment insurance and how low the benefits have become. There also needs to be real jobs programs, better than those of the 1930s, to provide work on needed projects for the millions of the unemployed. And there should be an end to the increasingly punitive measures that penalize the poor, the unemployed, and the disadvantaged — from sadistic relief requirements to laws criminalizing being poor in public.

There should be an end to market fundamentalism, which has shown itself to be a sadistic and incompetent system. There should be an end to the deregulation and privatization of the government. Years of this deregulation has left us with government regulatory agencies that are obedient servants of the industries they supposedly regulate, and with government services that are largely cash cows for private contractors.

The banking and financial system should be taken over and turned into a public service. The growth of huge banks and fancy so-called derivatives — or financial deals that are so complex that no one really understands them — has done nothing but provide spectacular profit to speculators and bankers, while cheating millions of people out of their homes and helping impoverish whole countries, like Greece. While the underlying cause of the present depression isn’t simply financial — it’s the usual capitalist economic cycle — the power of the financiers has made the situation infinitely worse for millions of people and blocked steps for reform.

We need to see that measures are taken in the defense of the environment as well as that of the workers. The same capitalists who are taking away our pensions and health care, are destroying the environment. This is no longer a future worry. The climate has already started deteriorating from decade to decade. A serious environmental program should combine defense of the environment and concern for mass welfare. It should not penalize the workers for the crimes of the capitalist polluters and alienate the masses, but bring workers into the enforcement of environmental regulations in the workplaces and communities. The economy and infrastructure should be rebuilt in an environmentally-friendly way, and this should be carried out in a way that helps provide jobs and training and inspiration for as many people as possible.

Indeed, it would be best if we could just replace the capitalist system by socialism, where the working people, not the capitalist elite, ran the economy. But right now even most workers aren’t ready for that. If they support parties called socialist, it’s what the politicians call socialism — as in Europe, where the socialist parties aren’t much different from the Democrats. So what is needed is for the working class to transform itself in the process of fighting for relief from the crisis and for an end to the ravages of market-fundamentalism. In the course of fighting for measures which are desperately needed now, the working class can learn that the problem isn’t simply individual abuses, but the rule of the capitalists as a class. The workers can start to learn whether the Democrats really are on our side, and why the union bureaucrats never want to really fight the corporations. And they can start to consider what socialism, as a true alternative to capitalism, should really be.

So even if socialism is not close, it is important for working class to revive the revolutionary goal of overthrowing capitalist rule. This is part of what’s needed to build a movement in the spirit of class struggle.
The following two articles are from Detroit Workers’ Voice #106, Feb. 20, 2013. Congressional action in April has temporarily preserved six-day mail delivery, but the post office is continuing to downsize. It is closing down many post offices and other facilities, or drastically cutting the hours they are open, and postal management still hopes to eventually eliminate Saturday delivery.

DWV #106 was distributed at a number of postal facilities around Detroit, and included an appeal for workers to take part in the National Day of Action to Save America’s Postal Service (March 17), called by Communities and Postal Workers United (cpwunited.com), and the National Day of Action to Save Six-Day Delivery (March 24), called by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Over 500 postal workers and supporters came out to the action in Detroit on March 24, making it the liveliest action organized by a postal union in Detroit for a long time. 300 copies of DWV #106 were distributed there. But after the National Day of Action, the leaders of the NALC went back to sleep.

On Feb. 6, Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe announced that starting in August there will be no Saturday delivery of mail except for packages. It’s estimated this will eliminate 25,000 jobs. Six days of work will now have to be done in five, intensifying the exploitation of the workforce. And service to the public will continue to decline.

Some in Congress may challenge the legality of Donahoe’s move because in the past Congress has legislated the number of days mail is delivered. But Congress does not oppose Donahoe’s basic goals. The Democrats mainly back a bill that would establish five-day delivery a couple of years from now. The Republicans have their own 5-day bill. As for Obama, he announced support for 5-day delivery in 2011. The only problem was that political bickering has prevented any of the bills from passing yet. So Donahoe decided to start putting the bill’s proposals into action on his own.

Five-day delivery is part of management’s anti-worker onslaught supposedly necessary to solve the $16 billion postal budget deficit. This includes massive wage cuts for new workers and the elimination of 186,000 jobs since 2006. But these “cures” have nothing to do with the cause of the budget woes. The deficits are overwhelmingly the product of a Congressional bill passed in 2006 that required the post office to pre-fund retirement health benefits for the next 75 in a mere 10 years, something unheard of in private business and government agencies. Were it not for the exorbitant pre-funding requirements the present crisis would not exist.

Management itself has opposed the pre-funding of health benefits, but this does not place them on the workers’ side. In the five years prior to the present crisis for example, about 83,000 career jobs were cut as management’s way of avoiding budget problems. Management may not like having to cover the expenses imposed by the health care pre-funding. But, as always, it demands the workers bear the burden of the crisis.

Postal workers are being run over time after time, and the strategy of the leadership of the postal unions has proved completely ineffective in stopping this. Yes, the union leaders sometimes have snappy criticisms against management. But they collaborate with management. Thus, when new contracts with management help the USPS decimate the workforce, the main union officials hide the setbacks or justify them. Insofar as there is struggle against the USPS bosses, it is within strict limits. Organizing the rank and file for struggles within the postal facilities is avoided. Public actions of any kind are rare. Militant action that would really press management is off limits. The union leaders do not even try to get basic union rights like the right to strike.

Instead of reliance on the workers’ own actions they are told that salvation will come with the election of Democrats. Workers are told to give money and campaign for these so-called “union-friendly” politicians. And in the end, these same politicians sell the workers down the river. Is it any wonder management is slaughtering the workers!

The road forward

The survival of the workers depends on taking up the course of class struggle, not collaboration. This will not spring up instantly, but now is the time to begin organizing in this direction. Rather than rely on the union leaders to give up their sellout policy, rank-and-file workers must see that they themselves are the only ones they can rely upon. What sorts of things can be done? Concerned workers should get in touch with each other to form workplace groups. Connections between such groups can develop. Through these groups, the rank and file can express their own views and decide what course of action to take. Views opposing management crimes and the sellout union leaders can be spread via leaflets, social media, etc. not only in the post office but to other workers and the community. This helps draw more forces into the struggle.

The rank-and-file organizations must break through the limits imposed on mass collective action by the union bureaucracy. When contract concessions hit one craft, the rank and file can build united protests of all crafts. Likewise, united protests can help temporary workers abolish their separate and unequal status and encourage them to join the struggles of career workers. Management attacks on workers in general, like the huge increase in facility closings, job losses, overwork and cuts in public service due to 5-day mail delivery also need to be opposed by united actions.

The type of actions will vary according to the needs of the struggle and the strength of worker organizations. Pickets, marches, community meetings, work slowdowns, walkouts, and strikes are among the means to fight management. The ability to hold protests without union permission need not stop us from attending union meetings or rare protests which will allow us to reach more workers. Presently there are few places with organized opposition to the sell-out union leadership. We need more groups, and with a clearer stand. It will take time and effort to build a coordinated struggle to stop the attacks on us. For now
our victories may be small. They may just be stopping management from harassing a worker or forcing the union officials to stop management from violating the contract. But small wins can draw in workers. Worker resistance can start here!

NALC leaders hail disastrous anti-worker contract arbitration ruling

On January 10 an arbitration board issued a 4-1/2 year collective bargaining settlement between USPS management and the letter carriers union, the NALC. The settlement is a betrayal. But the next day NALC president Frederic Rolando glorified this sellout, saying “this agreement rewards city carriers.” Let’s look at these so-called “rewards.”

Big leap in cheap temporary labor, present TEs screwed

Rolando brags that this new settlement has “no two-tier pay scale”. Wrong. Besides creating a cheaper extra tier for new career carriers, the settlement would create a big new temporary labor force called City Carrier Assistants (CCAs), which itself has two tiers. CCAs will replace the present TEs (Transitional Employees) and expand the non-career work force limit from the previous 3.5% to 15%, or 20% if the USPS attempts new ventures. CCAs do normal carrier tasks. But they are hired only for 360 days. Whether they get rehired is up to management as are, with minor restrictions, the number of hours they get to work. CCA wages for workers not previously in the post office start at $15/hr., inadequate for a stable if very modest existence. Pensions, health benefits and employee rights are limited or non-existent.

The treatment of former TEs is scandalous. They aren’t automatically converted to CCAs. They first have to take a challenging test which tells little about whether they can do the job they have already proven they can do. If they fail the test, they’re out of a job. If the TE does become a CCA, their wages will drop almost $6/hr., barely higher than the other CCAs. What a great system!

Unlike the past, no one can hire in as a career letter carrier. First you must serve your CCA sentence. No one knows if they’ll ever become a career worker. It could take many years during which it’ll be tough to avoid financial ruin. No one knows if they’ll even be many career jobs opening up. Management abolished 40,000 carrier jobs from 2007 to 2011. The only sure thing is the CCA will have a hard time keeping their heads above water.

Massive pay cuts for new career letter carriers

If a CCA makes it into a career job, they will find its wages are far less than those of career workers hired before the settlement. Rolando himself states “the award lowered the entry wage for new career letter carriers” and “created a new step progression”, i.e. a new pay scale! New career carriers’ entry wages will be over $9,000 lower than those in the old contract. The new career letter carrier wages will slowly creep forward toward the previous wages over 12.4 years, only becoming roughly equal at the point where present carrier wages have attained their top incremental step. Again the new workforce is stabbed in the back!

Present career carriers not spared

Present career carriers may feel bad that new carriers will be screwed, but may think that won’t affect them. That’s not so. Once management gets lower-paid career jobs and still worse off CCAs they will press that all career workers get lower pay and benefits.

But what of the other “rewards” for present career workers? No wage hikes for the contract’s first two years, no COLA for the first three years. Tiny increases in wages and COLA thereafter. Worse, the share of payment for health care premiums by USPS decreases from 80% to 76% for present career carriers while for new carriers it goes from 77% to 76%. This means not just an increase in the percent paid by carriers, but the percent paid of greatly increasing premium rates. NALC literature tries to hide this saying a family insurance plan policy of $15,000 would “only” cost an additional $600 by contract’s end. Actually, if we take into account the average rise of premium costs in 2010 or 2011 (between 7-8%) for FEHBP insurance plans, the increased cost the first year will be around $1,000 and around $2000/yr or more at the end of the contract.

Job cuts and overwork

The big issues of job cuts and overwork are, shamefully, not even a topic of contract settlements. Since 2000, the USPS has eliminated about 270,000 career jobs, counting all crafts. This has meant huge workload increases. For carriers, routes have become much longer. Workers are pushed to the breaking point, long-term injuries multiply. Besides that public service suffers and the unemployment rate rises.

Union leadership sellouts and rank-and-file resistance

Thus, management won big over the letter carriers just as clerks were hammered in their last APWU contract which was quite similar to the carrier settlement. But the union leaderships don’t care how much they have to deceive the rank and file. They make speeches declaring that the postal budget problems aren’t due to the wages of the workers. Yet the NALC leaders proclaim victory when wages are cut 25% and a fifth of the workforce will be so-called “assistants” with pitiful hourly wages and no guarantee of work hours. They shout “Save the Post Office”, but this slogan for them only means supporting the massive elimination of career workers which will result in closing post offices, reducing their hours of operation and
lengthening mail delivery times. Only a leadership of sellouts could act this way.

Enough! Postal workers have been beaten down. But anger toward management and the union leadership remains. It’s time for ordinary workers to begin organizing themselves. The long, hard road to developing real worker resistance should begin now!

Don’t fall for the fake reforms of Obama/Congress
Full rights for all immigrants, now!

The following article is from Detroit Workers’ Voice #107 (May 1), which was distributed at May Day and Cinco de Mayo events.

May Day is the holiday of the world’s workers. It commemorates the May 1 start of the 1886 general strike for the 8-hour day in the United States, a historic strike in which the working people united across national lines to fight for their independent class interests. And it’s a day when workers today lay demands upon the capitalist class as a whole, and rally forces for future battles.

This year workers of all nationalities must again stand up for immigrant rights. When migrant workers from Mexico and elsewhere are forced to live under the threat of deportation they are subject to vicious exploitation. The low wages and brutal conditions imposed on “illegals” fattens the profits of the capitalists and helps them lower wages and conditions across the board. Thus the need for the entire working class to fight for full rights for all immigrants.

Meanwhile the capitalists, who have sunk the economy and impose job and wage cuts everywhere, try to blame austerity on the immigrants they abuse. They fear that immigrant and US-born workers will unite to fight for full rights, now. They remember the years when huge demonstrations of immigrant and non-immigrant workers took to the streets.

This is why Obama and a group of Republican and Democratic legislators are putting forward their own “reforms” styled to suit the needs of capitalist businesses, not those of the victims of the present system. Backing these fake reforms are the sellout trade union leadership and a number of meek reformist organizations in the Latino community and elsewhere. The present bipartisan reform bill may not make it through Congress and likely will be watered down further. But the general features are clear.

Continued deportations

The supposed friend of migrant workers, Obama, has already deported far more people than any president in US history, including a record of over 400,000 in fiscal year 2012. Nearly a quarter of those deported were parents of children who were US citizens. But wait! Aren’t the new reforms supposed to provide undocumented workers with a path to citizenship? But many immigrants won’t be eligible for the program: some won’t be able to provide the necessary documentation, while no one who came to the US after Dec. 31, 2011 will be eligible at all. Repressive measures at the workplace are to be stepped up

against those not taking part, while those who do take part in the program will find that they face many traps and restrictions.

A long, degrading, and snare-filled path to citizenship

Just to get a green card, an undocumented immigrant would first have to slave ten years under the new “Registered Provision Immigration” (RPI) status, pay thousands of dollars in fines and fees, prove that they’ve worked regularly, and demonstrate knowledge of civic and English. Further, anyone laid off or who had a medical emergency during those years couldn’t get unemployment compensation, Medicaid, or food stamps despite all the taxes they’ve paid, and unemployment for more than 60 days at a time may threaten one’s RPI status. Three misdemeanors or one felony conviction would disqualify one, while one continues to face harassment for being poor and Mexican or for trying to organize a union or a strike.

Moreover, if you get through all this, whether you get a green card depends on how many green card holders the politicians decide they will allow. To move from green card status to full citizenship takes 3 more years, 13 (!) years in all. And you couldn’t get a green card until the the Secretary of Homeland Security certifies measures concerning the “security” of the US-Mexican border and immigration status checks at the workplace.

Is it any wonder that a supporter of this reform, Republican Marco Rubio, praises this path to citizenship because “the alternative we’ve created is going to be longer, more expensive and more difficult to navigate” than going back to one’s home country and waiting for ten years to apply for a US visa.”

More “guest workers”

Compared to the millions of undocumented immigrants overall, the so-called “guest worker” programs cover only a small number of immigrants, who are imported to the US legally but still without full rights. Highly educated and skilled “H1-B” employees would eventually reach 180,000. Another 200,000 “W visa” workers would enter as agricultural, construction, hotel and other low-wage workers in the first year. To show what humanitarians they are, the bill’s backers will supposedly allow guest workers to be paid the same as other workers already there. Of course the whole idea of bringing in the guest workers is to keep already miserable wages from rising by assuring there will be more workers available than jobs.
Further militarizing the Mexican border

Twenty year ago, fewer than 4,000 Border Patrol agents worked the entire southern border. Today there are 18,500, while drones and detectors are everywhere. But nothing can stop people from escaping a desperate economic situation. Only the collapse of opportunity due to economic disaster in the US has caused border crossings to drop for now. Meanwhile, the border police-state has made crossing the border so hard that over 477 people have died trying last year. The bipartisan “reform” bill would add billions of dollars to beef up police measures and continue the trial of death.

Workers, unite for immigration rights!

So that is what the bipartisan group of politicians from the two main parties are offering. It amounts to no immigrant rights now; continued slave labor indefinitely; some relief maybe in the distant future. Who does this serve? The capitalists who don’t want rights for the undocumented lest they organize against their poverty and unite with other workers to do so.

March on May Day!
Full rights for all immigrants, now!

Below is the text of the leaflet of the Seattle Communist Study Group, April 19, 2013 in support of May Day actions.

May Day is the holiday of the world’s workers. It commemorates the May 1 start of the 1886 general strike for the 8-hour work day in the United States, a historic strike in which the working people united nationally to fight for their independent class interests for the first time. And it’s a day when workers lay demands upon the capitalist class as a whole, and rally forces for future battles.

This year’s May Day marches in the U.S. are again standing up for immigrant rights. When migrant workers are denied rights and forced to live under the threat of deportation they’re easier to exploit, thereby increasing the capitalists’ profits. This super-exploitation of one part of the working class is not only unjust, but is also used to drive down the wages and conditions of the rest of the working class. Thus, the need for the entire working class to fight for full rights for all immigrants — a reform. But in unison with many leading Republicans, social-security and medicare-cutting Obama is also pushing for immigration reform. So we had better look into the kind of immigration reform Obama says he’ll sign. And that’s contained in the 844-page bipartisan reform bill which the “gang of eight” in Democrat-controlled Senate has just released. (If passed, it will have to be compromised with a worse bill from the Republican-controlled House, if the House even comes up with a bill.) Some of its features are:

More deportations. The supposed friend of migrant workers, Obama, has already deported more people than any president in U.S. history by far, including a record of over 400,000 in fiscal year 2012. Nearly a quarter of those deportations involved parents whose children are U.S. citizens. This inhuman policy will continue. Among others, it will be directed at hundreds of thousands of undocumented people who arrived in the country after Dec. 31, 2011 plus undocumented new arrivals; at large numbers of immigrants unable to meet the requirements necessary to get (or keep) the new “Registered Provision Immigrant”(RPI) legal status and green cards; at those who will refuse to participate in the entire bureaucratic, fascist, trap-filled DHS process, which will also include a mandatory E-Verify card.

Further militarizing the Mexico border. Twenty years ago, fewer than 4,000 Border Patrol agents worked the entire southern border. Today there are 18,500. Some 651 miles of fence have been built, and drones and electronic devices are everywhere. The result has been racist murder, i.e., in order to avoid fences and surveillance, a record of at least 477 people died from the elements in the deserts just last year, while attempted crossings have actually declined since the outbreak of the U.S. economic crisis. Border Patrol agents even destroy water bottles left on desert routes by U.S. citizens who are dedicated to saving lives. But that’s not enough. The “gang of eight” bill would spend $4.5 billion more on surveilance and fences, and an additional $2 billion if “initial goals aren’t met.” It would fund 3,500 additional Customs agents nationwide, and authorize deployment of the National Guard on the border with Mexico.

Who tries to bolster support for this fake reform? The leadership of the AFL-CIO, and the section of immigrant rights groups with ties to the Democratic Party.

What is the way out then? History teaches that a progressive immigration reform is only going to be won through massive and militant struggles like those of the 1930s and 1960s and early 1970s. This was the path the immigration rights movement was starting to take in early 2006: huge demonstrations, the May Day “day without an immigrant” strike and boycott, etc.

A first step in reviving the movement requires exposing the rotten reform currently being debated in workplaces, schools, and in working class communities. Workers, students, and activists should get together, even if in small groups at first, to promote the program of full rights for immigrants.

We should expect no quick victories, but our cause is just. The reform the capitalists want means continued abuse of millions of immigrant workers. The reform the working class should demand is full rights for all our class brothers and sisters now!
More "guest workers." To serve the high-tech industries, the bill would raise the cap on highly educated and skilled H-1B workers to 110,000 the first year, and then allow it to go to 180,000. To serve the agricultural, construction, hotel and other capitalists, 200,000 "guest" wage slaves will be authorized the first year under a new "W visa," with annual increases for the next three years. After that, a new government bureau would determine the cap. W visa workers cannot quit their employer to take any new job they wish, but must hire on with another employer in the same industry who is authorized to employ W visa workers.

"Guest workers" would be allowed to eventually become citizens, and are supposed to be paid the prevailing rates in the geographic areas where they're employed, which is good. But those wages are notoriously low, while the jobs are hard, dirty and dangerous. And raising them enough to attract a stable domestic workforce would greatly reduce the capitalists profits. So importing thousands and thousands of "guest workers" at present low rates solves their problem nicely—which is why construction, agricultural and other capitalists are already loudly complaining that the "guest worker" caps are too low!

Discrimination against the poor and less educated. The reform would shift away from giving green cards to people with relatives in the U.S. to an immigration policy strictly serving the needs of the capitalists. And since the U.S. education system has gone to hell, 40% of employment-based visas would be reserved for professionals holding advanced degrees, especially in science, technology, engineering or mathematics, plus there would be a new "merit based" visas. Thus, a humble worker with U.S. family members would be pushed aside by the needs of the capitalists.

A long, degrading, snare-filled path to citizenship. Just to get a green card, one would first have to slave ten years under the new RPI status (which would have to be renewed at the six-year mark), pay thousands of dollars in fines and fees, prove that they've worked regularly, and "demonstrate knowledge of civics and English," an anti-democratic requirement. Further, anyone laid off or who had a medical emergency during those years couldn't get unemployment compensation, medicaid, or food stamps despite all the taxes they'd paid...and they'd better not get arrested in a strike or protest because that might put them over the limit of three misdemeanors or one felony conviction. Moreover, actually getting a green card would be contingent upon there not already being too many green card holders (according to the limits the politicians set) who had come through the legal immigration route. Then, after getting a green card, one would have to wait three more years to get citizenship. Thus, thirteen years (!), and it would only start after the Secretary of Homeland Security had certified measures concerning the "security" of the southern border (the so-called border triggers). The Christian Science Monitor estimates that it would be almost 2030 before the main bloc of today's undocumented immigrants could start becoming citizens.

"Gang of eight" conservative Republican Marco Rubio praises this path to citizenship, saying that "the alternative we've created is going to be longer, more expensive and more difficult to navigate" than going back to one's home country and waiting ten years to apply for a U.S. visa.

So the immigration reform Obama pledges to "sign right away" turns out to be a reform most vile. This is because the Democrats, like the Republicans, are political tools of the biggest banks and corporations. And what about the AFL-CIO (which collaborated with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to help write the "guest worker" provisions of the bill) and the various immigrant rights groups who've for years preached reliance on the Democrats? Well, they're now hiding the rotten nature of the proposed reform. This is why the immigrant rights movement has to be built without and against both capitalist parties and their defenders.

Indeed, history is teaching that a progressive immigration reform is only going to be won through massive and militant struggles like those of the 1930s and 1960s and early 70s, a path the immigrant rights movement was starting to take in early 2006: huge demonstrations, the May Day "day without an immigrant" strike and boycott, etc. A first step in reviving the movement requires exposing and denouncing the rotten reform currently being debated in workplaces, schools, and on the streets. It requires organizing groups of workers and others to do this, as well as holding meetings and organizing actions. And it requires linking up with others in the country who are determined to do the same.

We should expect no quick victories, but our cause is just. The reform the capitalists want means continued super-exploitation and abuse, the platform of the workers is full rights for all our class brothers and sisters now!

Denounce Obama's immigration reform!
Everyone out for May Day!

James Bradley writes history books about World War II, a previous one being *Flags of Our Fathers*, which became a popular movie. Bradley says he was led to look into the roots of World War II in the Pacific: what started it, what were the underlying causes and motivations? This search led him back to the early 1900s and the administration of Theodore Roosevelt. I doubt that *Imperial Cruise* will be made into a Hollywood movie, since it's a major attack on an American hero, Teddy Roosevelt. The book shows that the U.S. was involved in secret diplomacy and treaties in the early 1900s which drove it into contradictions with Japan. The frame of the book is the cruise taken in summer 1905 by Secretary of War William Howard Taft, accompanied by Roosevelt’s daughter Alice and scores of Congressional Representatives and Senators, to the Far East. The cruise took place at the same time that TR was involved in negotiations between Russia and Japan to end the Russo-Japanese War. The cruise and concomitant negotiations injected the U.S. big-time into Far Eastern diplomatic affairs, but none of the negotiations and agreements was subject to review by the U.S. Senate, the public or even Roosevelt’s own administration. By himself Roosevelt got the U.S. secretly embroiled in imperialist quid-pro-quo's in the Far East, the details of which have only recently been made public.

The book’s relevance to today is that it blows away the heroic halo from one of America’s greatest historical icons, Teddy Roosevelt. It paints TR as a greedy expansionist whose dreams of imperialist grandeur were built on racist foundations. Not only was TR brutal and racist, Bradley also paints him as stupid and shortsighted, his bullheaded errors in foreign policy making complex problems worse. Bradley also reveals many parallels to today’s foreign policy issues.

What got me interested in the book was noticing comments made by Lenin in the 1917-18 period predicting a coming war between Japan and America. At the time the two countries were allies in World War I, so it seemed rather early to be predicting war between them. But Lenin thought war between the two might erupt very soon. He saw the contradictions emerging between them, and I thought Bradley’s book might offer more insight into what these contradictions were and how they arose.

**Roosevelt’s Racism**

One of the parallels to today’s politics brought out by Bradley is the deep-seated racism that pervades American foreign policy. This is something that dominated American thinking in World War II, when the Japanese were portrayed as “slant-eyed yellow bastards” and Japanese-Americans were rounded up in concentration camps. And it still exists as a major strain in American thinking today, as Arabs are targeted for indiscriminate bombing in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Arab-Americans in the U.S. are routinely targeted as terrorist threats. Domestically our “leaders” in government and business have largely written off the next generation of black youth despite the presence of some women and minorities among the privileged strata.

In the case of Roosevelt, Bradley shows his ideology was not only madly nationalistic but also racist. He was mad for imperialist expansion and saw nothing wrong with running end-runs around laws and the Constitution to do it, and this was motivated by a racist theory of White destiny. TR constantly talked of the great destiny for those of “Teutonic” blood and the need for them to carry out “ethnic conquest.” This was basic to his approach to Far Eastern peoples.

Roosevelt studied law at Columbia University where he took political science classes from John Burgess. Columbia’s website brags about Burgess being “the father of American political science”. But what was Burgess’ actual ideology? Burgess taught that only those Whites with Teutonic blood were fit to rule, because they were the ones (supposedly) who invented the first states. Teutonic Aryans had spread west from the forests of Germany to England and America, and it was their destiny to rule the world. (Bradley gives quotes about this on p. 329.) Roosevelt took Burgess’ lessons to heart and even in late middle age paid tribute to Burgess and his ideology.

Burgess’ racism goes even deeper than shown by Bradley. Burgess was a prominent member of the so-called Dunning School of Reconstruction (Dunning was a professor of history at Columbia contemporary with Burgess). The Dunning School promoted that post-Civil War Reconstruction was a big mistake because it tried to bring blacks into a position of equality with whites. Dunning and his colleagues popularized derogatory terms such as “scalawags” (Southern whites who cooperated with Reconstruction efforts) and “carpetbaggers” (Northerners who went South to help carry out Reconstruction), and they applauded the KKK for working to restore the South’s “natural order.” They taught that the freedmen were incapable of self-government, a typical example being this quote from Burgess: “A black skin means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subduing passion to reason.” Burgess argued that Reconstruction was a mistake of the Republican Party, and he was anxious to get this mistake recognized and corrected as the U.S. came upon the world stage of imperialism. In 1902 he wrote: “And now that the U.S. has embarked in imperial enterprises, … the Republican Party … is learning every day by valuable experiences that there are vast differences in political capacity between the races, and that it is the white man’s mission, his duty and his right, to hold the reins of political power in his own hands for the civilization of the world and the welfare of mankind.” (from the preface to Burgess’ book, *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876*, available online from Google books).

This was the ideology inculcated into young Roosevelt and which he held onto into late middle age. One way this was exemplified was by Roosevelt’s policy toward immigration. A Chinese Exclusion Act had been passed in 1882, but it was due to expire in 1902, and Roosevelt made its renewal a priority. Roosevelt wanted to replace the Act with even more stringent anti-Chinese provisions, and for this he utilized the sitting Commissioner General of Immigration, Terence Powderly. Powderly was the former leader of the Knights of Labor, the
major trade union of the 1880s, which had led race war against Chinese workers at that time. The Knights were a complex group that in some places organized African-Americans into trade unions, and this made them more progressive than other trade-union groups like the AFL. But in the Western U.S. they were hostile to Chinese workers, and Powderly remained a racist long after the decline of the Knights.

Roosevelt’s own assessment was, “No greater calamity could now befall the United States than to have the Pacific slope fill up with a Mongolian population.” (p. 284) When TR became president, in 1901, Powderly wrote an article for Colliers’ Weekly, “Exclude Anarchist and Chinaman!”, in which he praised the new president and argued that Americans should support Roosevelt because he had their “race interests” at heart. Bradley quotes from Powderly’s article: “American and Chinese civilizations are antagonistic; they cannot live and thrive and both survive on the same soil. One or the other must perish.” (p. 287) This was the kind of support Roosevelt used to pass an even worse version of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

The parallels to today’s debate over Mexican immigration policy are obvious, though Bradley does not discuss them. Like the Chinese of yesteryear, Mexican immigrants today are supposed to work for lower wages and then be punished for it; they’re supposed to pay taxes and obey laws and yet not have any of the rights of citizens; American capitalists are supposed to enjoy an open door in Mexico while Mexican immigrants face a closed door in the U.S. This is just like America’s attitude toward China around 1900 – Roosevelt fought for the Open Door policy (meaning free trade) in China while slamming shut the door on Chinese immigrants. And after Roosevelt this came to be the American policy towards Japan and Japanese immigrants.

**American Imperialism**

When Roosevelt first came into McKinley’s administration as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he came in looking for a war. Roosevelt publicly lobbied for greater U.S. expansion, and in private he wrote to friends: “In strict confidence … I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one.” (p. 75) McKinley hesitated at first, but he was eventually won over to endorse imperialist war against Spain in Cuba and the Philippines.

Bradley seems to consider America’s imperialist expansion as due largely to Roosevelt’s personal oddities. But it would be wrong to attribute American imperialism solely to Roosevelt. Lenin described in his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* that the decades before World War I were a mad scramble for colonies and markets. The imperialist powers of that time divided up the rest of the world and intensified their military preparations for war. American imperialist expansion was part of this, and Roosevelt simply gave voice to America’s peculiar ideology: Manifest Destiny and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority.

The connection to racist ideology has changed in form somewhat, but today it’s still a major component of U.S. imperialism. In Vietnam a basic slogan guiding the U.S. military was “Kill ‘em all; let God sort ‘em out.” A similar mentality has guided recent wars in the Mideast, where the U.S. massacred thousands of Iraqis and today murders Afghan civilians with drone attacks. Domestically, people of Arab or Moslem descent are subject to special hounding by the police, FBI and airline security. The recent murder of an East Indian man by a woman in New York, who pushed him in front of a subway train, is another example illustrating that anti-Moslem racism has seeped into backward sections of the population.

Imperialist expansion in the Far East had a history for the U.S. going back to before the Civil War. Bradley gives the history of U.S. involvement in Hawaii, Korea and Japan, though he doesn’t go into commercial and economic interests (sugar, shipping, whaling, etc.) very much. He does mention America’s goal of building a chain of coaling stations in the Pacific (Hawaii, Philippines, etc.) so that American steamships, both merchantmen and warships, could travel freely across the ocean.

**Snatching the Philippines**

Bradley gives a graphic account of how the U.S. took over the Philippines. The U.S. offered to help the Philippines independence movement, but then, once the Spanish had been defeated, the U.S. army turned against its Filipino allies and slaughtered them. Though the Filipinos had already set up a functioning government, American leaders considered them “Pacific Negroes” incapable of self-government and waged war against Filipino leaders. To secure the islands President Roosevelt appointed as military governor one of his favorites, an up-and-coming yes-man from Ohio, William Howard Taft. Taft was affable towards Filipinos who kowtowed to American occupation, but he was firm in telling them they could not expect independence for another 100 years at least.

Meanwhile the U.S. army was hunting Filipino insurgent leaders, while the native rebels were ambushing U.S. army patrols. Bradley describes how the American press kept assuring readers “the war is over” and “the Filipinos love us”, even as the war was raging. Bradley draws the obvious parallels to Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Veterans from Vietnam can testify about seeing the TV news tell Americans “the campaign was successful, with only a few American casualties” and at the same time seeing American bodies stacked up in rows at U.S. bases. The original military thrust into Vietnam, like in the Philippines, was accompanied by a big lie promoted by the press about hostile natives supposedly attacking American “peacekeepers.” This was the Tonkin Gulf incident, an American provocation that was built up by the press as a major attack by North Vietnamese on innocent American sailors. More recently the press helped Bush build up the big lie about “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq to justify his aggression. And today the press never tires of telling us how the U.S. is bringing civilization and progress to Afghanistan, which oddly enough the Afghans respond to by killing “peaceful” Americans. A lying press is an essential feature of imperialism.

There are also parallels with the counter-insurgency tactics, the torture and brutality towards natives. The American army rounded up Filipino civilians and herded them into relocation camps, where thousands died from disease. The U.S. later practiced similar “relocation” in Vietnam. Soldiers carried out waterboarding on Filipino villagers to get information from them about rebel leaders; many of them died from the torture. So waterboarding is not something new invented by the CIA; it’s been part of the imperialist weapons kit for a long time. Soldiers also practiced the normal imperialist hobbies of rape, collecting
“trophy”, etc. All in all, Roosevelt's “pacification” of the Philippines presents a classic case of imperialism in action.

One of the most horrific examples was the Moro Massacre of 1906. Army and navy personnel surrounded a group of Moro rebels, tribesmen armed with primitive weapons and accompanied by their women and children. Gen. Leonard Wood, the commanding officer present, ordered a full-scale attack that wiped out the entire group, killing every single Moro man, woman and child. Upwards of 600 people were slaughtered.

Mark Twain, a member of the Anti-Imperialist League, wrote a scathing commentary on the massacre in which he said, sarcastically, “This is incomparably the greatest victory that was ever achieved by the Christian soldiers of the United States.” In previous wars, Twain notes, American forces suffered casualties about equal to the enemy; but not in this one-sided “victory,” in which trained soldiers attacked people armed with knives, clubs and ineffectual muskets. But Roosevelt seriously lauded the “brilliant feat of arms” in a congratulatory message he sent to Gen. Wood. (Note that Wood was a personal friend of Roosevelt’s: TR got him appointed officer in charge of the Rough Riders, a band of cavalry Roosevelt organized to fight in Cuba. Wood was later appointed governor of Cuba and later still governor of the Philippines. Twain’s comments on the Moro Massacre can be seen at www.is.wayne.edu/mnissani/cr/moro.htm.)

When the press cannot avoid mentioning imperialist brutality, it’s excused with the argument, “It’s unfortunate, but necessary when you’re fighting uncivilized heathens.” When all else fails, as in Vietnam, the lying press aims its fire against itself and concocts the “stab in the back” theory, promoting the lie that the war was lost because the wimpy liberal media did not support the war effort. But in fact, from the days of the Tonkin Gulf incident and even before, the establishment press was enthusiastic about American aggression in Vietnam. The generals who were supposedly “restrained” by the liberal media in fact carried out unrestrained war in Southeast Asia, bombing both North and South Vietnam and neighboring countries, defoliating with Agent Orange, burning people with napalm, etc.

Opening Japan

Bradley also gives the background to U.S. presence in Japan. After seeing what happened to China, and having negative experiences themselves with Western traders, the Japanese decided to keep their country closed, or very limited, to Western commerce. This practice continued until 1853, when the American Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo harbor with a fleet of warships and demanded trade. Under threat of bombardment the emperor’s government eventually signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with the U.S. in 1858. Diplomatic relations were opened, and American merchant ships began visiting Japan. In the early 1860s, however, local overlords who disagreed with the emperor’s treaty opened fire on American ships that tried to visit the port of Shimonoseki. American warships were dispatched there and carried out a punitive raid, bombarding the port city and Japanese ships moored there. This was during the American Civil War; American warships in the Far East were unsuccessful in catching Confederate raiders, but they succeeded in quelling Japanese resistance to trade.

British warships also bombarded Shimonoseki. This was nothing new for the British, since they had previously carried out two Opium Wars against China, suppressed the Sepoy rebellion in India, and launched military adventures all over Asia. But Perry’s opening of Japan and the subsequent attack on Shimonoseki announced the new American presence in the Far East. And after the Civil War the U.S. deepened its presence there.

Japanese Imperialism

After Perry’s opening of Japan and the Meiji restoration, Japan quickly modernized, built up its armed forces and began learning the methods of Western imperialism. Japanese imperialism was not just copied from the West, as Bradley implies; Japan had its own internal class divisions and its own rapidly developing capitalism. But Bradley’s correct in showing Western influence on Japan’s evolution. Its first foray into imperialism came with the punitive expedition against Taiwan in 1871. Taiwanese natives had killed some sailors from Okinawa who shipwrecked near Taiwan, and the Japanese government decided to claim the right to intervene in the affair (at that time both Okinawa and Taiwan were semi-independent kingdoms, though they both confessed loyalty to the Chinese emperor). Japan’s punitive expedition against the Taiwanese was organized by an American ex-general, Charles LeGendre, who had urged the Japanese to punish the “uncivilized heathens” and to adopt a Far East version of the Monroe Doctrine. (Bradley, pp. 186-88)

Japan’s next foray into imperialist adventure was the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Japan easily won victory over China and as reward was given large territorial concessions in Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria. But at this point Western imperialist powers intervened. The Tripartite Intervention (by Russia, Germany and France) threatened war against Japan, a war the Japanese felt they would lose, so they agreed to give back what they had gained from China. But the Japanese regarded this as a deep humiliation and spent the next ten years nursing their revenge. This came with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Russia was expanding into Manchuria at the same time that the Japanese were trying to expand into Korea. They clashed, and the result was massive, disastrous defeat for Russia on both land and sea.

Roosevelt secretly cheered on the Japanese during this war, writing friends “the Japanese are playing our game.” (Considering TR’s racial theories, one would think he would side with the White leaders of Russia, but TR considered that the Russians had mixed with Mongolians and so had mongrelized their White ancestry; he had nothing but contempt for such race-mixers. He preferred the Japanese, whom he considered “honorary Aryans.”) On a more realistic plane, TR was happy to see the Japanese confronting the Russians and preventing them from doing a walk-over in China following construction of their Trans-Siberian railway. But while secretly encouraging the Japanese, Roosevelt also posed as a man of peace and publicly called for negotiations. He wanted to call a stop to Japanese expansion following their defeats of the Russians, and the Japanese for their part were now short of money and men, so they agreed to enter peace talks.

Summing up Roosevelt’s actions in the peace talks, Bradley gives the main thesis of the book on p. 250: “… The president of the United States had skirted the Constitution and negotiated a side deal with the Japanese at the same time he was posing as an

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honest broker between Japan and Russia at the Portsmouth peace talks. …” Bradley considers Roosevelt skirted the Constitution because he made a verbal treaty with Japan not subject to advice and consent from the Senate. In fact Roosevelt didn’t consult anyone, not even his own people in the State Dept. and the War Dept. except Taft.

**Roosevelt’s Secret Treaty**

TR was acting the “honest broker” in peace talks while at the same time his agent and yes-man, Taft, was in Tokyo cementing a secret deal between the U.S. and Japan. It turns out this was the main purpose of Taft’s “imperial cruise.” It wasn’t just a peaceful visit by Taft and his retinue; its purpose was to cement an imperialist alliance.

So what was the secret deal? Basically, it was a swap of the Philippines for Korea. The Japanese recognized American occupation of the Philippines and promised to leave them alone while the U.S. gave Japan the go-ahead to expand into Korea and Manchuria’s Liaotung Peninsula. The U.S. had previously signed a friendship treaty with Korea promising to support them and “use their friendly services” in case of any threats. The Korean government thought this meant they were protected by the U.S. But with Roosevelt’s new alliance with Japan, “friendly services” were interpreted by Roosevelt as “helping Korea come under Japanese hegemony.” Korea was thrown under the bus just as Czechoslovakia was later sold out by Chamberlain at Munich. And it had the same result: encouraging militarist expansion.

The other part of the deal, which Japan also made with Britain, was to support the Open Door policy on China. Other imperialist nations had gained territorial concessions from the Chinese. The U.S., which came late to the concessions table, demanded the right to free trade in other imperialists’ areas. The British, who had gained the largest territorial concessions (including Hong Kong), also supported the Open Door, since they were confident of winning any trade competitions. The Japanese promised to support this policy against the other imperialists and also promised to practice it in any areas of China they gained control over.

In their press conference at the end of Taft’s visit, the Japanese said they would abide by agreements and go ahead and expand into Korea and China, acting as the “civilizing force”. (p. 251) This is exactly what Roosevelt wanted. TR thought he was getting the Japanese to act as U.S. agents, securing U.S. rights in the Far East. He was also proud that he had brought the Japanese onboard as Oriental followers of Western ideas and practices (racism, imperialism, and “civilizing” expansion). He had a few moments of doubt, that maybe the Japanese would constitute a threat to U.S. interests someday, but these were quickly dismissed.

**The Dance of Imperialist Alliances**

So who was using whom? TR thought he was using the Japanese as his tool. He said they were “playing our game” by attacking Russia and supporting the Open Door. But Bradley argues that Roosevelt actually was playing into Japanese hands. Clearly there was an unprincipled dance of alliances going on for decades. Japan concocted a secret Tripartite Alliance with America and Britain against Russia at this time, while during World War I Japan was allied with Britain and America against Germany. Later, as relations with the U.S. became frosty and Japan continued to expand into China, the Japanese shut off the Open Door and converted Korea and parts of China into direct colonies. Then in World War II Japan allied itself with Germany against America and Britain.

As part of his “game” TR secretly encouraged, supported and promoted a Japanese Monroe Doctrine. The Japanese took this seriously and talked about it up through the 1940s. If the Americans could claim the Western Hemisphere as their sphere of interest, why couldn’t Japan claim the Far East as their own sphere of interest? But though Roosevelt was happy to encourage such thoughts to use Japan as a block against Russia, later U.S. presidents grew more concerned with stopping Japanese expansion. This intensified in the 1920s as other imperialist powers such as France and Germany dropped out of China while U.S. and Japanese expansion brought them more and more into head-to-head competition. Japan grew more desirous of dominating China, and industrialization whetted their desire for the raw materials of Southeast Asia (rubber, oil, etc.), access to which was controlled by the U.S. and its commercial allies (Britain, France, Holland).

Bradley criticizes Roosevelt for his stupidity because, as it turned out, the Japanese were unhappy with the peace deal he secured them. They gained territory on the Asian mainland but got no cash indemnity from Russia, and this was something they sorely needed at the time. Bradley concludes (p. 322): “With their bumbling diplomacy, Roosevelt and Taft had accomplished the seemingly impossible: they gave Korea to Japan and at the same time turned Japanese sentiment against America.” This resentment against America grew in the ensuing decades as the U.S. and Japan confronted each other more and more directly.

**Bradley’s Liberal Imperialism**

Bradley has performed a service by pulling together information about Roosevelt’s foreign policy and showing its ideological bases. He exposes TR as a racist and exposes the brutal imperialist practices of American imperialism in the Philippines and elsewhere. The book is well written and illustrated with contemporary photos and cartoons. Bradley did a good job of researching Roosevelt’s motivations and their consequences.

But the U.S.-Japan clash in World War II was not just a result of Roosevelt’s personal biases and blunders. The timing and nature of that clash were dependent on many factors, but the clash was inevitable, given the imperialist nature of both countries.

The main defect of the book is that Bradley does not go far enough in condemning imperialism. He criticizes Roosevelt, but it’s from the standpoint of a liberal who disagrees with TR’s racist brutality. The overt racism and direct colonization of TR’s day are no longer preferred methods of imperialism. But American imperialism is still very active in the world, and Bradley accepts that the government is obliged to advance American capitalist interests around the world. This is made clear when he criticizes Roosevelt for stupidly blundering and allowing American trade to suffer. Bradley never questions whether another way of running foreign policy, based on proletarian internationalism rather than bourgeois self-interest
and nationalistic aggrandizement, is possible. This was the type of alternative Lenin was looking toward when he led the Bolsheviks in overthrowing the imperialist Russian government in 1917.

**Lenin’s Alternative**

What got me interested in Bradley’s book in the first place were quotations like the following from Lenin which show Lenin’s prescience regarding the coming war between America and Japan in East Asia. This is from a report on foreign policy delivered at a joint meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee and the Moscow Soviet on May 14, 1918. (Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 41, pp. 365-381) In this quote Lenin is explaining what makes the continued existence of Soviet Russia possible, that the imperialists cannot join together for an attack against Russia because they are too busy fighting among themselves:

“… The contradictions that have arisen … have made it impossible for the imperialists themselves to stop this war [World War I].

“Owing to these contradictions, it has come about that the general alliance of the imperialists of all countries… -- that this alliance is not the moving force of politics.

“… in certain circumstances the alliance of world imperialism is impossible. …

“The basic contradictions between the imperialist powers have led to such a merciless struggle that, while recognizing its hopelessness, neither the one, nor the other group is in a position to extricate itself at will from the iron grip of this war. The war has brought out two main contradictions … The first is the battle being waged on the Western front between Germany and Britain …

“The second contradiction determining Russia’s international position is the rivalry between Japan and America. Over several decades the economic development of these countries has produced a vast amount of inflammable material which makes inevitable a desperate clash between them for domination of the Pacific Ocean and the surrounding territories. The entire diplomatic and economic history of the Far East leaves no room for doubt that under capitalist conditions it is impossible to avert the imminent conflict between Japan and America. This contradiction, temporarily concealed by the alliance of Japan and America against Germany, delays Japanese imperialism’s attack on Russia … The campaign [against Russia] is being held up because it threatens to turn the hidden conflict between America and Japan into open war. … [But Lenin concludes:] It may well be that the tiniest spark will suffice to blow up the existing alignment of powers, and then the afore-mentioned contradictions will no longer protect us.” (Lenin, pp. 367-368)

So Lenin regarded war between Japan and America as inevitable, that it was being held up temporarily by unusual circumstances, but these might change at any time -- which they did. As World War I ended, Soviet Russia was attacked by Japan, America, England and other imperialist powers. Japan and America came close to war at that time (in the early 1920s), as Lenin predicted, because the imperialist intervention “threatened to turn the hidden conflict into open war”. As Japan invaded Siberia, the U.S. landed troops in the Far East ostensibly to support Japan but actually to supervise and make sure Japanese troops went into Siberia, not towards China. As the Allied troops suffered reverses, and domestic support for intervention withered, the imperialists eventually withdrew from Soviet Russia. But the contradictions between Japan and America did not go away; they intensified and eventually exploded in World War II.

Revolution in Russia provided hope for the world’s laboring people, hope that there was an alternative to the dance of imperialist alliances. When the Bolsheviks took over in Russia, they publicized the secret imperialist treaties between the czar and the governments of Britain, France and other countries. They exposed the imperialist rivalries that gave rise to World War I, and they pulled Russia out of the war. They established ties with other nations not based on imperialist exploitation.

Lenin’s outlook is still important today as the world’s working people look for an alternative to racist brutality and war. The anti-imperialist movement was fairly weak at the time Roosevelt was president, and American groups like the Anti-Imperialist League were not able to mount strong opposition to Roosevelt’s policies in the Philippines. Lenin pointed to the shortcomings of the League when he wrote:

“In the United States, the imperialist war waged against Spain in 1898 stirred up the opposition of the ‘anti-imperialists’, the last of the Mohicans of bourgeois democracy who declared the war to be ‘criminal’, regarded the annexation of foreign territories as a violation of the Constitution, declared that the treatment of Aguinaldo, leader of the Filipinos (the Americans promised him the independence of his country, but later landed troops and annexed it), was ‘Jingo treachery’, and quoted the words of Lincoln: ‘When the white man governs himself, that is self-government; but when he governs himself and also governs others, it is no longer self-government; it is despotism.’ But as long as all this criticism shrank from recognizing the ineradicable bond between imperialism and the trusts, and therefore, between imperialism and the foundations of capitalism, while it shrank from joining the forces engendered by large-scale capitalism and its development – it remained a ‘pious wish.’” (from *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Chapter IX, sixth paragraph)

The victory of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 provided a breakthrough and showed people around the world that there is an alternative to imperialist brutality. This alternative is revolutionary struggle, based on the working class, which targets capitalism itself as well as its barbarous “externalities.” The Bolsheviks’ breakthrough helped inspire the anti-imperialist movement of the 1960s, when masses of people in the U.S. and other countries took to the streets to demand an end to the war...
against Vietnam. Building a strong anti-imperialist movement remains an issue for us today as we confront the militarists, the capitalists and their lying press.

Bradley shows that racist brutality is the companion of imperialism. He shows that the working class, in its struggle to oppose imperialism, cannot rely on misleaders like Terence Powderly, who are only interested in the self-interests of their own narrow ethnic group. But Bradley’s non-class anti-imperialism suffers from the same limitations as Mark Twain’s Anti-Imperialist League. The life and work of Lenin show us the alternative.

The new issue and some political problems

Editorial from the Spring-Summer 2013 issue of Struggle, an anti-establishment, working-class literary journal

Here we are, finally, with a new issue of Struggle! The fund-raising campaign was quite successful; you, the readers and writers, came through splendidly with enough help to finance this issue and half of the next one. Well played! And I finally managed to get an issue together. About time!

This issue has two prominent features. One is a series of ten poems by longtime contributor Raymond Nat Turner. Raymond has been on a roll lately, excoriating imperialism and its collaborator, the Black bourgeoisie, with poem after poem filled with sharp wit, striking wordplay and a deep sentiment for the Black masses and the working class in general. Other works of his can be seen on the web site Black Agenda Report. We are very pleased to feature him here.

The other prominent feature of this issue is a series of pieces attacking the oppression of women and especially condemning and exposing the rape culture. Some of these are very vivid; some of them link the rape culture of capitalism to U.S. imperialist aggression, notably in Vietnam. The issue of the enabling and commission of rape has come into focus especially sharply of late in India and Egypt, but it is typical of patriarchal capitalism, including here in the United States, where the Republican Party has blazed an ignominious path of rape-approval. The Democratic Party condemns rape while joining with the Republicans in an austerity campaign that will dehumanize the masses further, sowing the seeds for more rape. And abroad the Democrats simply murder thousands of people, many of them women, with Obama’s deadly drones.

We want to comment on three political issues. The first is Obama and the sequestration. This is a bipartisan (first suggested by Obama in fact) trick to make cuts on the benefits to the poor appear to be inevitable, out of the hands of both capitalist political parties. In the midst of this Obama, the liberal’s darling, declares – once again! – his desire to cut Social Security and Medicare. This is the goal he shares with the Republicans. No matter that the wealthy 1-and-a-few-more percent are wallowing in dough robbed from the workers! The Democrats cower before the banks, in lockstep with the Republicans! You Obama fans need to wake up and recognize that we, the workers and the poor, face a two-headed monster of capitalism dedicated to crushing us, and its commander is your darling Barack Obama. Massive struggles are going to emerge against this blatant robbery. The top trade union leaders and the prominent liberals are just as much a part of the capitalist machine as are Boehner, Ryan, Issa and Rush Limbaugh.

The second issue is what it means to be anti-imperialist. Many on the left think it is sufficient to simply oppose everything the U.S. government does in foreign affairs, whether the U.S. is in conflict with the working masses of a victim country, or with an upstart bourgeois dictator in such a country. These people think it is good to side with an upstart tyrant, like Libya’s Ghadafy or Syria’s Assad. But they are the murderers of the workers and poor in their countries! To side with them is to approve their atrocities against the people. This is what we in the Communist Voice Organization (see “Leninism and the Arab Spring” at www.communistvoice.org) call NON-CLASS ANTI-IMPERIALISM. In fact, because it abandons the masses, it is not anti-imperialism at all; it amounts to siding with the little mafia against the big mafia. Pox on both their houses! Side with the workers and the poor! That is what Lenin and the Communist International in its best days called anti-imperialism, and we should too.

The third issue is the environment. Activism is rising on this, and our great deceiver, President Obama, is expressing “concern” about the issue, after failing to raise it in the debates with Romney, even though Hurricane Sandy placed the issue firmly on the table (along with a whole lot of water). All the measures touted by the green establishment are impotent; they all rely solely on the capitalist market to solve a problem caused by the capitalist market. The market has no brain; it does not plan; that the market will make the best decisions is a fraudulent myth propagated by the neoliberals (which include both the Republicans and the Democrats). Market-environmentalism has accomplished absolutely nothing. CO2 levels are rocketing, along with other environmental atrocities such as fracking, oil pipelines and mountan-top removal in Appalachia. And nuke plants are degenerating, leaking and threatening disasters. The only answer is a mass working-class environmental movement. Only a mass struggle can force the capitalist government to take direct action against the polluters; and only a working-class movement can prevent those measures from becoming simply another way to rob the people by passing along the costs of regulation to the consumer.

For a working-class anti-imperialist movement and a working-class environmental movement!

Fight both of the parties of the rich, the Republicans and the Democrats!

Dare to struggle!

By Tim Hall
Struggle

A magazine of proletarian revolutionary literature

Struggle is an anti-establishment, revolutionary literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. It reaches out to “disgruntled” workers, dissatisfied youth and all the oppressed and abused and supports their fight against the rich capitalist rulers of the U.S. and the planet. It is open to a variety of artistic and literary forms and anti-establishment views. We welcome works with artistic power which rebel against some element of the capitalist power structure or against the entire system itself.

In the current Spring-Summer 2013 double issue, vol. 29, #1-2:

Commentary:
*Editorial: The new issue and some political problems (sequestration, non-class anti-imperialism, and the need for a working-class environmental movement)

Fiction, including:
*They never gave out any extra trays
*How does it feel’s?
*County Road 232
*The deer and the cross
*Limp limbs
*Driving south
*They had no ox

Non-fiction:
*The prophetic voice of Garcia Lorca in New York
*News about Struggle writers

Poetry, including:
*Ten poems, [by the author of “Better break away from the brazen black bourgeoisie”]
*Poems [by over a dozen authors]

Struggle’s editor is Tim Hall, an activist and Marxist-Leninist since the 1960s. Struggle is a non-profit magazine, produced and distributed by the voluntary labor of a very few people. Struggle welcomes poems, songs, short stories, short plays, line drawings. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. It pays its contributors in copies.

$2 per single-size issue ($3 by mail), $10 for a subscription of four, $12 for four for institutions, $15 for four overseas, free to prisoners. Double issues, which are twice the normal length, cost more. So the current issue, which is a double issue, costs $4 from a vendor. Bulk discounts and back issues (on anti-racism, against the Persian Gulf War, depicting the postal workers’ struggle) are available. Checks or money orders must be made payable to Tim Hall—Special Account.

Struggle’s postal address is now P.O. Box 28536, Joyfield Sta., Detroit, MI 48228-0536, or email Struggle at timhall11@yahoo.com.

Visit the Struggle website at Strugglemagazine.net!
An anti-revisionist at the 2013 Platypus Convention

As editor of Communist Voice, I attended the meetings of the Platypus International Convention from Friday to Saturday, April 5-6, and spoke on two panels on April 6. The theme of the convention was "Program and Utopia"; and most of the speakers don't seem to have been members of Platypus.

The Platypus Affiliated Society is an odd sort of organization — self-consciously so, as one can see by its name "Platypus", which is a reference to a strange-looking animal that is one of the few mammals that lays eggs. Their motto is "The left is dead! Long live the left!"; which means that they are devoted to dealing with the crisis of the left. Unfortunately, it isn't clear what they mean by the "left", nor how they expect to overcome its crisis. They mainly organize reading groups and forums on various subjects, and publish the Platypus Review, which carries articles mostly from outside Platypus. Their theory is a combination of Trotskyism with the Frankfurt school, while we at Communist Voice regard Trotskyism and postmodernism as symptoms of the crisis of the left, and hold that it is crucial to continue the anti-revisionist struggle, which requires opposing both revisionist ideologies, Trotskyism and Stalinism. But the positive part of the work of Platypus is organizing an exchange of views among activists of very different political trends.

I ended up speaking on two panels: One was the anti-imperialism panel: the official subject was whether there was a contradiction between anti-fascism and anti-imperialism, but the real subject was the Arab Spring and the Syrian uprising. Of the three panelists, I was the only one to defend the Syrian and Libyan uprisings. I gave a realistic assessment of the disappointing type of regimes that could be expected to arise from the struggles of the Arab Spring, while nevertheless holding that the overthrow of the old regimes was of tremendous importance for the revolutionary working class and the future development of anti-imperialism. I opposed non-class anti-imperialism, which judges struggles from their momentary effect, real or imagined, on the maneuvers of rival imperialisms rather than on their lasting effects on the situation of the working people.

My defense of the Syrian uprising met with the bitter opposition of Larry Everest, the speaker from the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party of the USA. He is a zealous supporter of non-class anti-imperialism; he spoke emotionally and at length of the crimes of imperialism and of RCP's Program and its Constitution for the future socialist republic, but overlooked an assessment of the current stage of the mass struggle in the Middle East or its importance for the future development of the revolutionary movement. He denounced me for supposedly backing "humanitarian imperialism" for supporting the Libyan uprising despite the NATO air intervention and for supporting the right of the insurgents to make use of the intervention. I denounced him as a liar, because he had heard me denounce Western imperialism, point out its danger to the Arab Spring, and the need for us to always expose its motives. At the same time I held that it was legitimate for uprisings to make use of the differences among outside reactionary powers, and that few revolutions in history had ever succeeded without doing so. The irony, of course, is that the RCP supports movements and governments that have also made use of such contradictions, and in particular in the discussion Larry Everest emphasized the importance of the Soviet Union’s struggle against the Nazis, and yet the Soviet Union received massive military aid from Western imperialism in World War II.

The other panel I spoke on was the environmental panel, where the subject was why the left and the environmental movement weren't doing that well. I was the only panelist who spoke of the need to build a working-class environmental movement that would openly oppose establishment environmentalism and its advocacy of failed market measures such as cap and trade or new fiascoes in the making, such as the carbon tax. The other two panelists would speak of opposing the fundamental logic of capitalism and of changes they wanted to see in society, but they wouldn't give an assessment of the nature of establishment environmentalism (correct on the dangers of global warming, but advocating harmful market measures).

Meanwhile the most notable figure at the convention was probably Andreas Karitzis, the representative from the Greek organization Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left - Unitary Social Front"), which is the official opposition in the Greek parliament to the servile parties of austerity. In fact, Syriza almost won the national elections of June 2012. And unlike the sell-out Greek Socialists, who are part of the pro-austerity coalition, Syriza is fighting austerity. Their representative described the history of Syriza, how it worked with the mass movements, and the brutal pressure from the bourgeoisie against them. But from the several presentations he gave, it also appears that Syriza isn't sure what it would or could do if it does come to power. This uncertainty was a major point in the discussion about Greece. This, it seems to me, shows one aspect of the fact that, despite Karitzis’ talk of overcoming capitalism, Syriza is a reformist party. It would prefer to proceed by renegotiating the austerity deal and getting better terms. It seems to know that this isn't likely to be possible, yet it hasn't yet confronted the question of what radical steps would be necessary to oppose the brutal financial, economic and political pressure the European bourgeoisie would put on a Greek government that rejects austerity.

For the text of my presentation on imperialism, see page 43. For the text of my presentation on the environment, see page 27.

Videos of the entire discussion at these panels can be found at http://media.platypus1917.org/category/april-2013/feed/. Other panels, including those with presentations by the representative of Syriza, can also be found there.

– Joseph Green
Today we want to give a working-class analysis of a recent major natural disaster, Hurricane Sandy, and global warming. I will give a brief talk and then open the floor for discussion.

I will go into some details about Hurricane Sandy in a moment, but first a comment about its relation to global warming, to tell you why we linked the two topics. While the capitalist presidential candidates, Obama and Romney, had a tacit agreement not to talk about global warming in their debates in the election campaign, suddenly Hurricane Sandy loomed up right before the election and placed the question of natural disasters square in front of the country and stimulated a new wave of thinking about these disasters and their relationship to global warming. Suddenly the potential danger of global warming became real, devastatingly real. We will go into this later in my talk.

Hurricane Sandy began developing in the Caribbean in late October. It rushed through Jamaica, Cuba and Haiti, reaching wind speeds of 115 mph and killing 38 people, 26 of them in Haiti, which was already devastated by its 2010 earthquake and by imperialist exploitation by the U.S. Sandy was a serious hurricane from the first. As it moved northward parallel to the U.S. Coast it lost some speed but gathered size, and predictions said that it would gather more strength when it would merge with a Nor’easter bearing down from (where else?) the northeast. As Sandy approached New Jersey and New York, the storm turned left toward shore as it merged with the Nor’easter. Its wind speeds reached 90 mph and it gained such massiveness that cold air and high winds extended 820 miles wide (we felt them in Michigan) and Sandy acquired the nickname “Frankenstorm.”

A gradual rise in sea levels due to global warming had already been challenging the New York-New Jersey area. Sea levels were already being measured at about 8 inches above the long-term trend, with 2 to 5 more inches expected by 2020. This had already forced authorities to begin speculating on how to deal with the rising sea, and insurance capitalists had begun figuring it into their plans of how to rob the insured. The New York harbor was already considered vulnerable to rising levels, although typically a class bias permeated the discussions, as sea levels were usually compared to the elevation of southern Manhattan and not with the more vulnerable areas such as Far Rockaway, Breezy Point and Staten Island, where workers and the poor were the residents. Even a slight rise in sea levels means that a storm surge will reach much further inland than previously, because the rise allows more water to pass inland without friction from the shore underneath it.

Weather scientists predicted the immense strength of the approaching Sandy well ahead of time. Various mobilizations and evacuations were planned and held. But despite the predictions of apocalypse, little real preparation was made, a government failure reminiscent of Hurricane Katrina. The poor were not fully evacuated from the most dangerous areas and little preparation was made to house them after the storm was over and their housing was destroyed or rendered unlivable. As it became clear after the storm, insufficient supplies of gasoline and heating oil were acquired, nor were the transformers at Con Ed, the electrical utility, prepared.

Sandy roared ashore with 80 mph winds five miles south of Atlantic City, New Jersey, at 8 p.m. October 29. It hit New Jersey and New York city heavily. Sandy simply pulverized the low-lying areas within its reach. Sandy’s pure kinetic energy for storm surge and wave “destruction potential” reached a 5.8 on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s 0 to 6 scale, the highest ever measured. Translated into life-and-death terms, 125 people died due to the hurricane in the U.S. (71 in the Caribbean). 72,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed in New Jersey alone (and up to 200, 000 homes in Cuba). And even when houses near the coast remained intact, electricity and heat were cut off and the population was subjected to great suffering. Sandy was almost as costly in money terms as the last great American disaster disgrace, Hurricane Katrina, and the poor have been treated with equal disdain by the government.

The worst affected by Sandy’s destruction were the poor and working-class, often black and other minority, communities such as Far Rockaway, Staten Island, Red Hook and Coney Island. An immense fire broke out in flooded Breezy Point, Queens, and quickly consumed 80 to 100 homes in that area. Not only the deaths and injuries, but the complete destruction of housing or the rendering of houses unlivable, plus the lack of electricity and heating oil for houses that were still intact, created tremendous suffering and destroyed the finances of thousands of workers and poor people.

The rich capitalists often forced workers into storm danger, which cost at least one life. A Ghanaian immigrant was told by his “big boss” (his words) to watch the expensive cars in the basement of the Manhattan business; it was inundated with water and he did not return. In another incident, a group of transit workers who had been ordered to work in a dangerous area of Coney Island by their bosses barely escaped with their lives.

Much of Manhattan, inhabited by Wall Street and many rich capitalist businesses and upper-middle class flunkies of the rich, was brought back to a functioning state fairly quickly. The subways were drained and power restored, mainly due to heroic efforts by unionized transit and electrical workers working 16-hour shifts. But still, lower Manhattan remains in trouble – in this case partly trouble for its rich owners. Apparently 15 to 18 million square feet of office space in the area is still unusable, due to lack of electrical and phone service. This is an area equal to all the office space in Dallas or Miami. Verizon, which provides phone service to the area, is having to entirely replace both its copper-wire and fiber-optic conduits, a job which may not be done for months.

Relief did not come quickly – or at all — for the poor, for the working class.

For workers who live in Manhattan, like those of devastated outlying areas, conditions remained terrible. The Lower East Side and Chinatown, both immigrant areas, experienced very serious destruction. Lack of preparation by the authorities
resulted in immediate widespread shortages of gasoline and heating oil. New York Mayor Bloomberg ordered city workers back to work within a few days of the storm, so thousands of city and other workers were threatened with loss of their jobs if they could not report for work, despite the obvious excuse of the storm and lack of gasoline, while at home they suffered from the fall cold. This was a big case of neglect of the workers and poor by the city, state and federal governments. It is inexcusable that insufficient supplies were on hand; there had been plenty of warning. In addition, it turns out that Con Ed’s transformers had not been maintained properly; in a dramatic explosion over darkened Manhattan one of them failed during the storm.

The rising waters also brought threats to nuclear plants. Five plants in the New York area reported problems, and one in New Jersey had to shut down.

Meanwhile, the outer communities near the ocean were devastated. Far Rockaway, Red Hook, Staten Island and others were nearly in ruins. Houses that remained standing were often filled with water. Some of these areas are without power even today! The treatment of the workers and poor during and after Sandy is a monstrous crime by the rich!

Despite the massive destruction of the homes of the poor and the workers, there was no big effort on the part of Obama and the federal government to plan for the re-housing of these people. A massive investment was needed, but at the time Obama preferred to have a photo opportunity with Governor Cristie of New Jersey, an opportunity to hug a Republican. In his tradition of giving nothing to the foreclosures in the housing crisis while handing trillions to the banks, Obama and the Democrats offered the Sandy victims honeyed words of “sympathy” and little massive help.

Now, over a month later, Obama is reportedly asking Congress for $50 billion in aid, $30 billion less than the governors of New Jersey and New York had asked for. And why must Obama ask the skinflint Congress for the money? In 2008 he gaily handed trillions directly to the banks! Clearly the big bankers who reside in Connecticut’s Gold Shore are way more important to this buddy of Wall Street than are the poor and minority workers of Far Rockaway or Breezy Point!

But this indifference was not shared by nearby workers and progressive activists, and residents themselves protested in various ways. Residents of the Red Hook community held a mass meeting in November 14 angrily demanding massive aid. Within days of the storm large numbers of volunteers rushed to help the critical areas and large amounts of material aid were donated. Thousands of people devoted long hours to aid the poor. This was a very moving effort. Occupy Wall Street leaped to help and wound up setting up the most efficient organization of aid, so recognized that the National Guard came to them for training. Occupy set up many relief collection centers throughout the New York area; today they maintain two in Brooklyn and one in Philadelphia and continue to supply the people, even though Mayor Bloomberg ordered the closing of Occupy Sandy’s open-air distribution centers in Rockaway and elsewhere.

Now, over a month after the hurricane, poor workers in the devastated areas are still without housing and even power in many places. Occupy Wall Street reported Thursday: “A month after Hurricane Sandy first hit many residents, homeowners and tenants alike are still living without electricity, heat, and working appliances. Black mold is taking hold of walls and other surfaces, and absentee landlords refuse to fix their properties. Temporary housing is desperately needed.” Many landlords are refusing to fix their properties as they wait in hopes that rich capitalist developers, who have been eying these coastal properties for years, will buy them out.

I will end this section of my talk with a poem by a Facebook friend of mine in New York, Mark Naison:

Notorious Phd’s Sandy Jam

Bayonne, Red Hook, Lower East Side
Sandy crushed us while politicians lied
Millions flooded, Breezy’s homes in flames
Casualties of Climate Change
Flooded, battered, frightened and cold
From Jersey to Connecticut whether young and old
We found homes and stores and restaurants gone
While fossil fuel giants still piled profits on
Beaten to our knees, we try to recover
We reach out in pain and find one another
Compassion and courage help us restore and rebuild
But if we don’t change how we live it could get us all killed
Now Bloomberg wants to run his marathon
On Staten Island where homes are gone
Down Fourth Ave where people fight for gas
Half a mile from Red Hook where food goes fast
It’s up to us to make things right
First help one another then carry the fight
To the Big Money people who run this town
Who enrich themselves while poor folks drown.

Hurricane Sandy was an immense disaster for the workers and the poor of the NY-NJ area and an exposure of the failures of the Obama administration in protection and relief for the masses.

But Hurricane Sandy was also a clarion call to the masses to take seriously the question of global warming and to debate the methods of dealing with it. Over the past 3-5 years the U.S. has seen mounting natural disasters: wildfires in the west due to the dryness resulting from drought; massive and long-lasting drought throughout the southwest and elsewhere; unprecedentedly powerful tornadoes, and others. And all along, average temperatures have kept rising; north pole ice has kept melting, causing dark, open water and snowless land to absorb rather than reflect heat; and permafrost in the near-polar northern regions has been melting, releasing the very powerful greenhouse gas, methane. And sea levels and sea temperatures keep creeping up.

Then came the disaster of Sandy. It arrived right in the middle of the presidential election campaign, while Obama and Romney were avoiding mention of global warming in the presidential debates. They might as well have agreed not to mention the elephant in the room, because he was ignored until he roared through the East Coast in the shape of Hurricane Sandy, Sandy demonstrated how serious the stakes are in the global warming question. The accepted wisdom about global warming had recently been that it might be causing some disasters. Hurricane Sandy shifted that general viewpoint forward, to the view that while global warming cannot be proven
to directly cause any individual disaster, it amplifies them and creates an environment in which greater and greater disasters are inevitable. A parallel might be that as a drought dries huge areas, you cannot say that the drought itself lit this or that fire directly, but with the drought the likelihood of fires and their intensity have both increased. The result is more and more destructive fires. Warming conditions, in the case of Sandy, can be said to have "raised the baseline" for further weather turbulence.

For example, higher water temperatures provide more energy for hurricanes to feed on and intensify, and the temperatures in the ocean off New York in September were 2.3 degrees Fahrenheit above the long-term average. The higher sea levels, even of 8 inches, meant that the storm would be far more destructive. Its destructiveness was also increased by Sandy’s merger with the Nor’easter, considered a North Atlantic typhoon; this storm was forced south by changes in the northern jet stream brought about by the melting of sea ice due to warming.

The result is that, while Sandy cannot be said to be caused, as a storm, by global warming, its size and destructiveness could only be caused by global warming. It was “Frankenstorm” because of global warming, nothing else.

In a recent op-ed in the Washington Post, James Hansen at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York [he has since resigned from NASA in order to devote more effort into environmental activism—CV] clarified the relationship of warming to disasters. He blamed climate change for excessive drought, based on six decades of measurements, not computer models: “Our analysis shows that it is no longer enough to say that global warming will increase the likelihood of extreme weather and to repeat the caveat that no individual weather event can be directly linked to climate change. To the contrary, our analysis shows that, for the extreme hot weather of the recent past, there is virtually no explanation other than climate change.” He went on to write that the Russian heat wave of 2010 and catastrophic droughts in Texas and Oklahoma in 2011 could each be attributed to climate change, concluding that “the odds that natural variability created these extremes are minuscule, vanishingly small. To count on those odds would be like quitting your job and playing the lottery every morning to pay the bills.”

So it is with natural disasters like hurricane Sandy. Warmer ocean waters, due to global warming, cause more intense hurricanes. Rising sea levels mean that they cause more damage to human life and property. And when you look around and see greater and greater droughts, more intense tornadoes, bigger wildfires and a whole list of amplified natural disasters, you cannot help but be influenced to see global warming as an underlying cause.

And the masses of working people in the U.S. are starting to see this; the attacks of the right-wing warming-deniers on pointy-headed professors’ “fantasies” about warming are wearing thin. The handwriting is being seen on the wall further and further from the scientific community.

Hurricane Sandy raises two questions: how to defend the masses of workers and poor in the face of increased dangers and how to combat global warming.

And just this week a new, even more deadly natural disaster hit the world – Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines. ("Typhoon" is the name for Asian hurricanes.) With raging winds at 150 miles an hour, this savage storm has killed over 540 people, with 825 still missing, including 200 fishermen. This total exceeds that of last December’s Typhoon Pablo, which killed over 400. The latest news is that Typhoon Bopha has turned around and come back to the Philippines (fortunately as a weakened storm), this time to northern rather than southern Luzon, the biggest island in the archipelago. Add these typhoons to Hurricane Sandy and an even stronger case is made for global warming as an underlying cause of greatly intensified natural disasters.

Plus, the threat Sandy offered to nuke plants makes that case even stronger, as it reminds us of the precarious nature of the plants in the U.S., many of which antiquated and as dangerously constructed as the Fukushima plants, are near rising waters, in flood zones or are built upon earthquake faults. The ongoing crisis at the Fukushima plants in Japan underlines how serious this threat is.

The capitalists and their governments around the world do not take global warming seriously. The U.S. Government refused to sign the Kyoto agreement on global warming in 1997; today it and the Chinese fake-communist government, which ludicrously claims that China is just a poor developing country, are resisting most efforts against global warming, not because they are insufficient but in order to preserve capitalist profits. And the other capitalist governments through most of the world are following suit. The program of Kyoto, called “cap-and-trade,” has been proven to be utterly ineffective. CO2 levels and temperatures have continued to rise and more rapidly than predicted. The reason cap-and-trade has failed is that it is a neoliberal market measure. That means that, instead of the governments regulating and enforcing major cuts in CO2 emissions, an artificial market in pollution permits was set up in the belief that price signals would encourage the plutocrats to cut emissions efficiently simply as a result of their drive for profits. A ridiculously complex system was set up, but the capitalists were not to be lured away from their polluting and emissions continued to rise.

As cap and trade flounders, the next program in line for trial, the carbon tax, is also a market measure in that it, too, merely seeks to use price signals to encourage the capitalists to cut their emissions. This, too, will fail, while it will alienate the working people against environmentalism because the costs to the capitalists of the carbon tax will just be passed along like any other cost increase to them – onto the backs of the public, in other words, largely on the working class majority of the country.

The only method that will stop the growth of CO2 emissions is straight-up governmental regulation, as was done (not very well) in 1978 when the chlorofluorocarbons threatened the ozone layer. But that was a much smaller problem than the CO2 emissions of today. It will take very vigorous government regulation of industry to cut today’s emissions sufficiently to slow global warming. The working class must fight for serious environmental planning and strict regulation of the capitalist polluters, and for enforcement of this regulation. If any of this takes place before a socialist revolution, it will be through a constant struggle against the repeated attempts of the bourgeoisie to undermine and subvert environmental regulation and against its attempts to carry regulation out in a way that squeezes the masses; this may become one of the triggers for a working-class socialist revolution.
About the speeches at the "Forward on Climate" rally of February 17, 2013

From a presentation by Pete Brown at the Detroit Workers' Voice Discussion Group meeting of March 17, 2013:

On February 17 there were environmental demonstrations at various places, especially in Washington, D.C. Fifteen-twenty thousand people rallied there against the proposed Keystone XL pipeline bringing heavy tar sands oil from Canada, through Nebraska and its aquifers, to Texas. The demonstrators also protested continued global warming and many other environmental issues.

Mainstream politicians tried to ignore the protesters. Right-wing Republicans made fun of the protesters for talking about global warming while their teeth were chattering from cold. President Obama was in Florida on a golf vacation paid for by corporate buddies of his who are leading tycoons in Texas oil and gas. But global warming and environmental disasters are becoming too glaring to ignore. The victims of storms, floods and droughts continue to suffer, but they're getting organized and angry. Obama mentioned them in his second inaugural and state of the union addresses, but he's done nothing to halt global warming. And Obama's energy policy is an “everything” policy based on failed market measures instead of focusing on the development of renewables and the phase-out of fossil fuels and nuclear.

Having large, militant demonstrations is important for building a movement for the transition to renewables. But militancy alone is not enough. Demonstrators should also advocate a plan or program for the transition. So far these large demonstrations have been dominated by the leadership of trends advocating market measures for the transition. Their political viewpoint is limited by their attachment to current forms of property. It's a positive thing that they're turning to more militant actions, actions that may popularize the issues and bring more of the masses to participate; but that by itself does not guarantee a progressive viewpoint. And some of their mass militancy is itself exaggerated. Like any typical opportunist, the environmental leaders doubled the number of people at the Washington demo, swearing to the media that there were 35,000 there. And they tried to present themselves as oppressed because they were supposedly ignored by the media; but in fact their demo was covered by the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and other major media including TV networks like NBC and CNN.

The people invited to speak at the February 17 rally are not exactly shut out from the corridors of power. Some of them are true-to-life bourgeois like Tom Steyer, a billionaire investor who's tried to get himself named Secretary of Energy. Steyer has set up a host of corporations, non-profits and charities dedicated to moving the U.S. away from fossil fuels to renewables. He provides seed money to new corporations to develop batteries, solar cells, wind turbines, etc., and he lobbies Congress to support clean energy companies. Steyer founded an energy institute at Stanford University and is on the board of directors there. He's a leading fundraiser for the Democratic Party and spoke at the 2012 Democratic convention, arguing that Romney would keep the U.S. stuck with fossil fuels, unlike Obama.

Another prominent speaker on February 17 was Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat from Rhode Island. Whitehouse is known for having sponsored various bills against global warming and for offshore prevention, to protect the oceans from pollution. But these were bills that were doomed from the start, and Whitehouse knew it. He sponsored them to gain credentials in a liberal seaside state. More recently Whitehouse has come out as cosponsor (with Rep. Henry Waxman, D-CA) of a carbon tax bill. Again, this is a bill that doesn't have a prayer of passing either house of Congress; but Whitehouse and Waxman like the idea of accommodating the transition to renewables to the market system, and arranging to have ordinary workers pay for the transition.

Another prominent Democratic speaker at the rally was Van Jones, who was at one time an Assistant Secretary of Energy under Obama, but was forced out because of his environmental stands. In his speech Jones called on Obama to do three things: 1) negotiate a climate change treaty directly with China, bypassing the multilateral negotiations that have failed in Copenhagen, etc.; 2) stop the Keystone XL pipeline by executive order; 3) use his presidential powers to get around the obstructionist Republicans in Congress.

Jones was addressing supporters of Obama who say he can't do anything because of various obstructions. Jones emphasized that Obama could go ahead and do a lot of things on his own. He emphasized that the decision on the XL pipeline is Obama's alone; Congress has nothing to do with it. And he said Obama could go ahead and negotiate a bilateral treaty with China, thus avoiding the wrangling that goes on at international multilateral meetings. Trouble is, this also avoids dealing with help to poor nations that are struggling to deal with climate change. And he said cap and trade, the same mechanism that was promoted at international meetings, is basic to carbon policy. One way or another, he said, the price of carbon must be raised; but he didn't explain who's going to be forced to pay for this.

All in all, Jones took a very respectful attitude toward "our president", very unlike another prominent speaker, Jill Stein of the Green Party. Stein was her party's presidential candidate in 2012, and on her website she tries hard to distinguish her policies from those of Obama and the Democrats. Stein attacks Obama for his "everything" policy on energy. Obama insists the future must include a mix of energy — fossil fuels, renewables and nuclear. Stein calls on people to oppose this and to make a stand for transition to renewables alone. This is fine, but how to make the transition? Stein tries to stress the positive points, that decarbonizing will create millions of green jobs. This may or may not be true, but in any case Stein tries to avoid the bitter pill of a carbon tax, which the Green Party actually makes prominent on their website. So it turns out that the Green Party has the same program as Van Jones, Senators Waxman, Whitehouse, Barbara
Boxer and a host of other Democratic Party liberals.

The main sponsor of the February 17 rally was an activist organization called 350.org, which became known for its confrontational demonstrations against the Keystone XL pipeline. 350.org took its name from a statement by James Hansen of NASA who said that 350 parts per million was the limit of the amount of allowable carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; anything more than that would lead to irretrievable climate change. (Currently we have 392 ppm; it's been above 350 since the 1980s.) 350.org organized a series of demonstrations against the XL pipeline in 2011 which heightened consciousness of the issue. These included a number of arrests and gained the support of many landowners, farmers and ranchers in Nebraska and Texas.

Their main leader is Bill McKibben. Back in the 90s McKibben wrote a popular book on global warming, _The End of Nature_. He's now a professor at Middlebury College in Vermont. His salary there is paid by the Schuman Foundation, which pays him an additional salary for sitting on the Schuman Foundation board of directors. This foundation finances things on PBS about responsible journalism, truth in journalism, etc.; its board is led by Bill Moyers. But the main financial backing for 350.org seems to come from the Rockefeller Foundation, which has given millions of dollars to McKibben's organization the last few years. So 350.org is a typical bourgeois liberal organization funded by liberal think tanks, some of them set up by petroleum millionaires themselves.

McKibben has been concerned about establishing environmental causes in mainstream politics. He wanted to take these causes out of the realm of tree-hugging radicals and push them into the face of bourgeois politicians. He insists that environmentalists are voters, not sideline radicals who can be ignored. This is the message he takes when he visits legislators. McKibben campaigned for Obama in 2008 and says he now expects Obama to live up to his promises. But he's short on specifics of how the transition to renewables should be done. 350.org doesn't get involved in specifics of carbon taxes, etc., but it does call on Obama to "put a price on all greenhouse gas pollution", which indicates they would support any carbon prices measure. But their main emphasis is on getting bodies out there demonstrating.

The Sierra Club was also present at February 17 and tried to grab headlines by getting its members arrested chained to the White House fence. In past years the Sierra Club has become known as a very conservative environmental organization that's known mostly for the corporate agreements they make, thereby sanctioning further rape of the environment. But they realized they were being left behind in the movement by activist organizations like 350.org. So this year they changed their official policy on civil disobedience, sanctioning its use, and sent representatives to Washington to try a make a name for their organization.

**State Department decision**

Two weeks after the February 17 protest, the State Department came out with their long-awaited report explaining their attitude to the XL pipeline. Since this is an international pipeline, Obama asked them to look into it and see if it served the interests of the U.S. to agree with Canada on this deal. Basically, the report said it's fine to have the pipeline, that it won't cause any irreparable harm to the environment. [The State Dept. report was written by Environment Resources Management, a private company under contract to TransCanada, the owner of the pipeline.--CV] If we don't allow the pipeline, they said, Canada will just find other ways of sending its tar sands oil to ports — for example by a pipeline to Vancouver, or by rail to the U.S. [Actually, there is quite a bit of protest in Canada against the transport of tar sands oil.--CV] And if we don't burn tar sands oil, we'll just burn other fossil fuels, so we might as well use this resource.

This report was a kick in the teeth to Feb. 17 protesters, especially those who still had faith that Obama was on their side. It indicated that Obama is going to certify the pipeline, probably soon, and gave warning that protesters should get out of the way. But the main organizations against the pipeline stepped up their activity as a result: the Sierra Club called on its members to get active, and 350.org called for "rapid responders" to hound Obama and Sec. of State Kerry wherever they appeared. They also outlined a plan to train a grassroots army this spring to oppose the pipeline, and also called for a divestment campaign. So it looks like demonstrations are going to continue by the main organizations involved.

**Working class trend**

It's clear there is a widespread environmental movement that includes everyone from tree-hugging radicals to big bourgeois like Tom Steyer and Mayor Bloomberg of New York. But what would a working class trend in this movement look like? First, it should be noted that this won't be led by the AFL-CIO bureaucrats. They have completely abdicated leadership by giving their wholehearted support to Obama's "everything" policy on energy. Journalists who have talked to Obama say that he's getting pressure from Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, to approve the XL pipeline right away to preserve the construction jobs involved.

Some of the more liberal trade union leaders such as those with UAW, Steelworkers, AFT, CWA, etc. have joined a group called the BlueGreen Alliance, which puts them in coalition with some environmentalist groups. But these are very conservative environmental groups like the NRDC, National Wildlife Federation, and Union of Concerned Scientists. Their political approach is mainstream Democratic Party, support for anything Obama does without being at all critical of the Republicans. Their main issue is jobs. They say they're for "green jobs", but they also push "buy American" to save jobs and "invest in manufacturing" like government support for new battery technology plants in Michigan. So they interpret just about any jobs as "green."

Meanwhile, what are working class activists doing? They will no doubt be in the forefront of militant mass actions, pushing forward the most radical actions and putting forth the most radical demands. The fact that bourgeois liberals are organizing mass demonstrations shows that they understand the power of mass action and see the need to get the masses involved, to some extent. But they will hang back when it comes to supporting demands that endanger capitalist concentrations of wealth and
power. And they will try to accommodate environmental demands to capitalist economics by constructing "carbon markets" and other market measures like the carbon tax and try to sell these to the masses as the way forward for getting rid of carbon.

But first of all, these measures don't work. This has been proven by the failure of the Kyoto Protocol and its cap-and-trade system. Secondly, they depend on raising carbon prices and making the masses pay. This is stated forthrightly by liberals like Van Jones and Chris Hayes of MSNBC, who argue that the only way to undercut the relatively cheap price of carbon is to force the masses to pay more for it, thereby making solar and wind power competitive. Similar support for the carbon tax comes from liberals like Thomas Friedman of the New York Times.

Working class activists should support direct regulation of carbon to bring about decarbonization and the transition to renewables. But to make these regulations effective and to bring the masses more in control of their environment, oversight by the masses is also necessary. This will put the working masses in better position to fight for socialism.

50 copies of the following pamphlet were distributed at the “Forward on Climate” rally:

**For a working-class environmental movement**

Four articles from the Communist Voice Organization:
* Say NO to fracking!
* Hurricane Sandy and global warming
* Class trends in the environmental movement:
  Not all that glitters is green
* The sorry result of the Cancun summit,
  the failure of climate capitalism, and
  the prospects for major change.

It is available for downloading at www.communistvoice.org/CVO-20130217-FourArticlesAboutTheEnv.pdf.
For a working class trend within the environmental movement, with a program opposed to the market measures of establishment environmentalism

Presentation by Joseph Green at the panel on “Capital, History and Environmental Politics” at the Platypus Convention, April 6, 2013

One reason that so little has been achieved on the environmental front, is that the working class movement is still in crisis. The class struggle and the environmental movement are linked. The corporations aren't going to do what's right out of the goodness of their hearts, and the working masses are the only class force which can consistently fight them.

As of yet, there isn't a mass working class trend within the environmental movement of this country, that is, a trend which doesn't just have some working class support, but has an environmental program which stands for serious measures of direct regulation and control as opposed to the market-based measures of the establishment environmentalists, and which calls for radical change in the present privatized government apparatus. Building such a trend is not an easy matter. But we can't just wait for the revolution to solve the environmental problems, that would let the world be devastated before our eyes without a struggle. And neither is it realistic to think that global warming can be averted hand-in-hand with neo-liberalism and in harmony with the growth of financial capital. If we are to discuss the historically-specific nature of the relationship between the growth of capital and ecological devastation, and if we are to discuss the history of the disorientation of the most of the left with regard to the environmental movement, we need to discuss the relationship of the present environmental fiascoes to market-fundamentalism, and the need for an environmental program that is fundamentally different from that of bourgeois environmentalism.

It is not enough to simply oppose the global warming denialists. Establishment environmentalism has led to a number of fiascoes that have done little to help, or have even made the situation worse, such as the promotion of corn ethanol in the US; the excessive search for biofuels under Kyoto, which has promoted the destruction of rain forests; the failure overall of the Kyoto system of cap and trade and carbon offsets; the promotion of allegedly "clean" forms of fossil fuels; and most recently, the increasing promotion of the carbon tax.

Some left trends are skeptical of any action now, and simply preach that environmental problems will be solved under their ideal form of society. That's sitting on one's hands, useless utopianism. Meanwhile reformist trends have simply acted as pressure groups for an agenda that leads them to merge with establishment environmentalism. That's sitting on one's hands in another way. There are also more militant environmentalists who have built an important movement of protest, and have even criticized certain market-based measures; these are valuable steps, but even this militant section of the movement has backed other market measures and generally has no critique of such major establishment environmental figures as Al Gore.

left-wing of the environmental movement still hasn't fully separated from establishment environmentalism.

An example of what reformist environmentalism leads to can be seen in the experience of the German Greens in 1998-2005, when they were part of the ruling Red-Green coalition, which was the government of Germany. The Greens were junior partners with the neo-liberals, endorsed the war in Afghanistan, and helped impose ugly, anti-working class austerity measures such as the so-called "Hartz IV" reforms, which were sort of a German form of Clinton's "ending welfare as we know it"; thus the Greens backed the main programs of German capital.

Other Green Parties may not be in government, but they don't look seriously at what happened in Germany. And worldwide the Greens, whatever their other promises of reform, generally back the carbon tax, which is the latest neo-liberal market panacea. The use of a heavy carbon tax as one of the main ways to cut down on carbon emissions will be a fiasco. This tax will be passed on from the energy corporations and the polluters to their customers, so it will have only an indirect effect on them. It will be just as complicated and obscure as cap and trade, as we already see in the way the carbon tax is implemented in British Columbia. It will threaten to discredit the phrase "tax the polluter" by identifying it with "tax the people". And it will not accomplish its aims.

And it's not just the Greens who can't emancipate themselves from market measures. Many other theoreticians who regard themselves as ecosocialists have promoted the supposed need for establishing the true value or true social cost of carbon-based fuels; this is nothing but the theoretical basis of the carbon tax. It's said that you can't fool Mother Nature. But the idea of giving thing their true social cost is that you supposedly can fool the invisible hand of Adam Smith.

Moreover, a large part of the environmental movement has or seeks bourgeois support and funding. A few years ago, the Corporate Responsibility Project did a chart of the relationship of environmental groups active in Pennsylvania with the polluters. I have reproduced this chart as a hand-out, with a list of Communist Voice articles on the environment on the other side. It was handed out at the end of the presentation to the audience. See pages 29-30.] Note that while I had permission from the CRP to reprint their chart in CV, they have no connection to CV, and they're not responsible for anything I say. Their chart is notable for trying to make sense of a spectrum of different types of groups that speak in the name of the environment, from corporate polluters and their front groups, to groups that are compromised in varying degrees by being funded by the bourgeois foundations if not corporations, and finally those grassroots groups which are largely unfunded and uncompromised.

The chart shows that problem isn't simply the puppet groups of the corporations, but that the bourgeoisie has influence on what seem to be serious environmental groups. Indeed, when I first saw this chart, I was surprised to see an activist group like
Greenpeace listed as a "moderately compromised" group, and then I did some research on the internet and found that in the 1990s it had become involved with deal-making with the corporations and was accused of a certain amount of greenwashing.

All this illustrates that the enthusiasm for the carbon tax, for example, is not because the workers are demanding it. Instead it's because it's something, it's hoped, the bourgeoisie may agree to. A working-class environmental movement would be one that fought this coalition, rather than being silent about it or seeking measures to come to agreement with it.

The environmental groups that have made their peace with market fundamentalism may still talk about allying with the working class. This is often done with the promise of "green jobs". The idea is that one can promise subsidies to the bourgeoisie for green projects, call it "green jobs" to the workers, and unite with the pro-capitalist labor leaders. This is sort of the idea of the BlueGreen Alliance of certain environmental groups and trade unions. But this is not what building a truly working class movement environmental movement means.

A working-class class environmental movement would be one that brings the class struggle into the environmental movement. It would demand that environmental and economic planning include planning for mass welfare as an independent goal, alongside that of protecting the environment. It would mean seeking mass influence in government planning and environmental decisions and in oversight of corporate compliance with environmental regulations, and it would denounce the presently-privatized government apparatus.

Present-day environmental problems, from global warming to the devastation of the oceans, from the need to changed farming methods to the problem of the deluge of poisonous chemicals, require regulation and control, and not corporate-government partnership. Marx pointed out that it was the lack of overall planning that led to the capitalist devastation of the environment, while the Australian naturalist Timothy Flannery, in his notable book of 2005, The Weather Makers, pointed out that extensive environmental regulation would lead to economic planning as well, although for him this was the nightmare scenario. Meanwhile the growth of capital and its current phase of market fundamentalism has led to a bourgeois reaction against even capitalist forms of regulation and planning, to the denigration of "command and control", the privatization of government functions, etc.

Capitalism doesn't stand still. The decades right after World War II were the heyday of a supposed mixed capitalism. But the last few decades have been the period of rampant financialization, of market-fundamentalism, of privatization of government operations. This affected how supposed environmental measures were carried out. The system of carbon offsets under Kyoto was a bad idea no matter how it was carried out, but in fact it was carried out in a privatized way, where it was private experts hired by the corporations who were the referees of what was going on. It was the fox guarding the henhouse. A serious environmental program has to demand the end of this system.

We cannot put off environmental demands until revolution, but neither can there be any hope that market-based measures will be effective, and that subsidizing green business initiatives and readjusting prices will suffice. Environmental progress requires the imposition of regulation and planning. Moreover, if it is to be effective, this cannot be planning carried out by neo-liberal privatized bodies, or even by the old-style government bodies. There needs to be some measure of mass oversight, or else the corporations will defy environmental regulations, and the planning will consist of squeezing the masses.

Without such a working class environmental movement, there is no serious pressure to do what is needed.

No doubt working-class victories can only be partial under capitalism. And as long as capitalism exists, planning can only be partial, and government bodies will always be subject to regulatory capture. But constant struggle over environmental and regulatory backsliding will be one of the factors leading eventually to a new revolutionary consciousness in the working class. This protracted struggle will be the bridge between revitalized program and future utopia. However utopian this idea may seem at the present, it will look different as the world goes through major changes in the next few years. The multiple crises of the present are the harbinger of a new period of change; there is nothing so unrealistic as thinking that things will simply proceed as they have in the past.
Some articles from the Communist Voice on global warming, mass welfare, the failure of market-based solutions, and the different trends in the environmental movement
(available at www.communistvoice.org/00GlobalWarming.html)

Hurricane Sandy and global warming (2012)

Say NO to fracking! (2012)

Fukushima shows why we must build the fight against all nukes! (2011)

Al Gore and the Climate Reality Project: "24 hours of reality" about global warming, but continuing fantasy about market-based measures: (2011)

The sorry results of the Cancun global warming summit of 2010, the failure of climate capitalism, and the prospects of major change (2011)

The BP oil blowout: the dividends of decades of deregulation and neo-liberalism (2010)

Class trends in the environmental movement:
Not all that glitters is green (2010)

Know who you are dealing with ... the continuum of environmental groups
(Chart reprinted from the Corporate Accountability Project, and discussed in the article "Not all that glitters is green")

Obama's Katrina: the BP oil spill in the Gulf
Down with the market measures and establishment environmentalism that paved the way for this major catastrophe! (2010)

Lessons from the failure of the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009 (2010)

"Cap and trade" won't work: the politicians vs. the environment (2009)

Green jobs are not enough!: About The Green-Collar Economy of Van Jones (2009)

The carbon tax -- another failed free-market measure to avoid environmental planning (2008)

Al Gore's Nobel Peace Prize and the fiascos of corporate environmentalism (2008)

Marx and Engels on protecting the environment--

The coming of the environmental crisis, the failure of the free market, and the fear of a carbon dictatorship
(the Kyoto Protocol, carbon tax and trading, direct regulation, different types of planning, 2007)
- The environmental crisis is upon us
- New Orleans, a sign of things to come
- Failure of market-based measures
- The nature of direct environmental and economic planning and regulation
- War-style environmentalism and Tim Flannery's nightmare: the "carbon dictatorship"

For more about Communist Voice:
visit www.communistvoice.org, or write mail@communistvoice.org.
# Know Who You’re Dealing With...

## (a Continuum of Types of Organizations Affecting Environmental Matters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Org. Type</th>
<th>Corporate Polluters</th>
<th>Corporate Trade Associations</th>
<th>Corporate Front Groups (Public Relations, “Wise Use” Groups and Think Tanks)</th>
<th>Corporate Controlled Environmental Groups</th>
<th>Highly-Ccompromised Environmental Groups</th>
<th>Moderately Compromised Environmental Groups</th>
<th>Funded, but Generally Uncompromised Enviro Groups</th>
<th>Largely Unfunded / Grassroots Enviro Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Economic interest puts them at odds with environmental interests, requiring that they influence the rest of this spectrum.</td>
<td>Associations that represent the economic interest of their corporate or professional members.</td>
<td>Often established on behalf of corporate trade associations and with funding from corporate polluters.</td>
<td>Groups with a high degree of influence from corporate polluters, through funding and board connections.</td>
<td>Typically via corporate/state funding, corporate board members, or foundation-front groups set up by foundations with corporate-friendly agendas.</td>
<td>Often funded largely by membership, but agenda is somewhat compromised or directed by foundation or even corporate funding.</td>
<td>Either primarily membership-funded, or funding by foundations with few strings attached.</td>
<td>Generally no structural (financial or organization) conflicts of interest. Group agendas are capable of being more radical.</td>
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How the post-apartheid government in South Africa ended up shooting down miners at Marikana

From the presentation by Joseph Green at the Detroit Workers’ Voice Discussion group meeting on September 30, 2012:

The meeting today is on the South African strike wave and how a post-apartheid government ended up in the situation of shooting down 34 workers at Marikana. I’ll deal with the strike wave itself, how things reached this situation, the role in this played by the revisionist South African Communist Party, and how we get out of this situation.

About the strike wave

A month and a half ago, on August 16, people around the world were shocked to learn that in South Africa, supposedly a free country after the fall of apartheid, 34 platinum miners striking against the Lonmin company were shot down in cold blood at Marikana. This meeting, and the information about Marikana we had in the Detroit Workers’ Voice leaflet we circulated at Labor Day, and in our journal, Communist Voice [Issue #47, September 12, 2012], are part of international solidarity with the militant workers of South Africa.

Now the original story from the South African government was that armed miners had charged the police. But the facts that have trickled out afterward are that this massacre took place when the strikers and families were gathered at an out-of-the-way gathering point. The police blocked off one part of the location, channeling strikers in a direction that led them towards another police line. And then the police opened fire; they continued shooting at fleeing miners, so many were shot in the back; and they even hunted down individual miners to kill.

The government acted quickly — indicting not the police, but the strikers! It used two vicious laws from the apartheid era, the Dangerous Weapons Act of 1968 and the Regulations of Gathering Act of 1993, and charged the miners with murdering themselves. Only mass outrage forced the government to drop these outrageous charges, but it has continued to seek to forcibly repress the strike.

Meanwhile the mining company, Lonmin, threatened to fire all the strikers if they didn’t return to work, and the ANC-affiliated union, the National Union of Mineworkers, came to its own agreement with the company on September 5. But despite all this, the miners persisted in the strike, and won a major victory with their own settlement with Lonmin’s on September 18. According to various accounts, the miners had been demanding wages of 12,500 South African Rands a month. They received a pay rise of between 11% and 22%, along with a one-time settlement bonus of 2,000 Rands ($240). Rock-drill operators, the lowest-paid section of the miners, received the biggest percentage increase and ended up with a bit more than 11,000 R a month. These figures contradict what we had read earlier about the miners’ demands, where it was said that the poorest-paid miners, who were at the heart of the strike, received 4,000 R a month, and 12,500 R would be triple their pay. Now it is said they will have 11,000 R as a 22% increase. I haven’t been able to sort out this inconsistency in figures. But what is certain, is that the settlement at Lonmin’s inspired workers throughout South Africa. [Later consultation with a South African activist provided some clarification — the 4,000 R figure was for the basic pay at the bottom end of the wage scale after various deductions from the gross pay and excluding such things as the housing allowance, while the 11,000 R figure was the total expense to the company.]

The horrible conditions in the mines in South Africa have resulted in discontent and scattered strikes over the last year or more. Now a strike wave has broken out. In the notice I sent out for this meeting, I listed strikes at more platinum mines, this time owned by Anglo American, as well as 25,000 miners going out against the Gold Fields company. A few days ago, 35,000 miners struck AngloGold Ashanti, the world’s third largest gold producer, which yesterday announced that the strikes had forced it to close down operations throughout South Africa. Strikes have also broken out in transport, at Rebone furniture at Mogwase, and elsewhere, at places where the pay may be 1,200 R a month.

This has resulted in panic among South African capitalists, who fear being forced to pay reasonable wages. It has resulted in panic in the South African government, with the politicians from the ruling African National Congress threatening a big stick against strikers. And it has sent the leadership of ANC-affiliated unions, like the National Union of Miners, into hysteria. They are bitterly denouncing the various strikers and actions, and in fact the strikes have taken place against their will. Workers have been streaming out of the NUM — some into AMCU, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, and others simply into strike actions. The settlement at Marikana went over the head of the NUM; its agreement with Lonmin’s was simply cast aside. The Economist wrote that “The deal at Lonmin was brokered by a committee set up by miners, along with the South African Council of Churches and other civic leaders, not by the government or the unions.” (“South Africa’s trade unions: could the deal be contagious?”, September 19, The Economist online.)

The strike wave has thus been a crisis not only for the capitalists, but for the official South African institutions that claim the mantle of the struggle against apartheid. The post-apartheid government is in crisis; the ANC is in crisis, with infighting heating up between the faction led by President Zuma and that led by the expelled youth leader Julius Malema; and the ANC-affiliated COSATU union federation is in crisis.

Moreover, this strike wave may help bring to the world knowledge of the shocking poverty among the working masses of South Africa. It is 18 years since the overthrow of apartheid, and still large masses of black workers live in shacks; indeed, in the eThekweni municipality, which includes the major city of Durban, a third of the population lives in shacks. They have access only to poor education for their children, are lucky if they get clean water, and are treated like dirt. As for mine workers, 30% or more of them are subcontracted workers rather than
regular workers, receive much less pay than regular miners doing the same job, and only the AMCU will organize them. Many regular miners are migrant workers, who are forced to be apart from their families for the length of year-long contracts; they don't live in barracks like in apartheid-days, but instead in miserable shacks without running water, electricity, or proper sanitation.

Of course there have been other changes since the end of apartheid. The hated pass books are gone, and legal segregation has been abolished. More black workers are in skilled positions, and there is also a larger black professional class. But inequality has grown tremendously. The leaders of the ANC and COSATU are rich, sometimes fabulously so. Times have changed, but economic destitution on the bottom has remained, and the gap between rich and poor has only become larger. Today, the gap between the lifespan of blacks and whites in South Africa is about 22 years, 49 for blacks, 71 for whites. But among whites, too, there is a growing divide between rich and poor.

**How did things get into this situation?**

How did this come about? The struggle against apartheid was one of the major struggles for freedom around the world. So long as apartheid existed, it meant the utter denial of the humanity of the black, so-called colored, and Asian masses. Apartheid was a blight not just on South Africa, but on Africa and the world as a whole. So why has racial apartheid been followed by such horrible conditions that it is being called economic apartheid?

Well, the dominant force in the struggle against apartheid was the African National Congress. It and its allies raised their flag of liberation in the famous Freedom Charter of 1955. It promised that South Africa belonged to all its people, black or white, and it demanded, not just the end of the various segregationist laws, but a fundamental change in the economic system. All the people were to share the wealth of South Africa. The land was to belong to those who worked it. The mineral wealth of South Africa was to belong to everyone, and the mining companies and other monopolies were to be nationalized. There was to be universal education, health care, and other essential rights.

But as apartheid tottered in its final years, the ANC leadership held a series of meetings with the leaders of the apartheid government and the Afrikaner National Party. A deal was worked out. This is not a conspiracy theory. These meetings were reported at the time in the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News*, and they are discussed today in the Wikipedia or in any serious account of the fall of apartheid. The deal was that the Afrikaner leadership would agree to allow elections and the expected formation of an ANC government, in exchange for various concessions including the ANC giving up on radical economic reforms. The white bourgeoisie was to maintain its economic positions, while, in effect, the promises of the Freedom Charter were to be cast aside.

So when the ANC government took power, it didn't carry out land to the tiller; it didn't nationalize the mines or other monopolies; and it adopted a strategy based on letting some blacks rise up into the bourgeoisie. This includes ANC leaders, some of whom have become multimillionaires with vast fortunes, including Cyril Ramaphosa, a major leader, at various times, of the ANC, of the COSATU union federation, and of the NUM, who has since founded an investment company which is a shareholder in the Lonmin mining company.

The basic strategy of the ANC government has been what is called Black Economic Empowerment. The idea is that the economy shouldn't be restructured, but instead black people should be able to climb into various positions in an old-style economy. In part, it's affirmative action. Now, affirmative action has been an important reform fought for in the US and elsewhere, and it has played a positive role here with regard to black workers, Latino workers, women workers, and others. But in the US, we didn't have the possibility of actually taking over the economy at the time. If one can take over industry and restructure it, one can, as part of this, radically eliminate segregation and racism. In South Africa, there was a possibility of major economic changes, and the ANC gave it up in return for BEE.

The ANC itself laments every so often that the results of BEE have been pitiful, and wrings its hands over what went wrong. President Zuma himself has shed crocodile tears over its failings, and admitted that BEE has resulted mainly in "a few individuals benefiting a lot," while leaving the leadership of most big companies in white hands and giving few gains to the black masses. (*The Economist*, March 31, 2010)

**The Economist**, the smug voice of neo-liberal orthodoxy and champion of capitalist interests, itself comments that: "The idea of legislating for black economic empowerment was originally promoted by big white businessmen to ward off post-apartheid calls for nationalisation. If a few well-connected black people were given chunks of the action, big business would, they hoped, be left alone. In that sense, BEE has been a roaring success, as whites still own the bulk of the country's wealth. Although renewed calls for the nationalisation of the mines and banks have recently been heard within ANC ranks, Mr Zuma, urged on by the new black capitalists, has repeatedly said that this is not on the government's agenda."

Along with BEE, the ANC government has carried out an increasingly market-fundamentalist economic policy. It has worked closely with the world bourgeoisie, and the IMF and the World Bank. Privatization, market fundamentalism, and close integration with world capitalist institutions were set forward in 1996 in the long-range economic blueprint called the GEAR program ("Growth, Employment and Redistribution"). And just as elsewhere in the world, the result has been to foster economic inequality. It has given profits to the capitalists, and fostered the growth of a black bourgeoisie, but it has left the masses in the dirt.

Of course, the ANC government has carried out some social programs. But the overall orientation of its policies has gone against the masses receiving much benefit from them. For example, the ANC government has fostered the building of a large number of modest houses for the poverty-stricken. But the number has been entirely inadequate, and forests of new shacks have proliferated around major cities and industrial areas. And, at the same time, the ANC government has fostered the tearing down of many houses of the poor in the name of "beautification", slum elimination, or for this or that economic project. For example, a couple of years ago, the ANC government decided to build the Moses Mabhida soccer stadium in Durban for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. There was no need to do this, as there was already an existing stadium, Kings Park, that could simply have
been upgraded. The new stadium was part of the general frenzy of the bourgeoisie to make profits from big sports projects—and it was, as is frequently the case with such projects, a financial disaster. But along with this project came the program to beautify Durban by tearing down the homes of working people. In Durban and elsewhere, the ANC government has fostered the so-called "Red Ants", red-uniformed poor people hired to tear down the homes of other poor people, with special viciousness against immigrant blacks from outside South Africa.

The problem of water and electricity for the masses still isn't solved, and the neo-liberal orientation towards the privatization of water and electricity is one of the main reasons. The South African government has also worked with the infamous World Bank to set up one of the largest coal-burning plants in the world, the Medupi Power Station, near the coal mining town of Lephalale in the province of Limpopo. It claims that this is an environmentally-sound step because the Medupi plant will supposedly generate less greenhouse gases than previous coal plants, and this method of destroying the environment in the name of saving it is typical of how the South African government works on other issues. And moreover, this electrical plant won't even solve the electrical crisis for the masses, since it is designed mostly for the needs of mining, and mining and other power-hungry capitalist industries are charged low energy prices while the black masses pay much high charges.

The point here is not that South Africa could have jumped to socialism if only the ANC hadn't made a poor choice. The point is that the leadership of the ANC abandoned the idea of radical reforms, and took up a market-fundamentalist program, hand-in-hand with the world bourgeoisie. It made its deal with the South African bourgeoisie because for years it had followed a policy of seeking rapprochement with it.

So what we see is that a great democratic victory, which the fall of apartheid definitely was, has resulted in an intensified class struggle. This is the general role which democratic struggles usually play. Nevertheless, it wasn't inevitable that the economic fruits for the working masses of the fall of apartheid would be so small. The servile policy toward the world bourgeoisie by the ANC leadership, and the rapidity with which the ANC leaders have shared the fruits of bourgeois enrichment, are a real betrayal of the interests of the South African working people.

**The role of the South African Communist Party**

I have been talking about the role of the ANC in bringing South Africa to the current crisis. But one can't ignore the role of the South African Communist Party, which has been closely tied to the ANC for decades and has an interlocked leadership with the ANC. It's no accident that the Moses Mabhida soccer stadium in Durban that I mentioned earlier is named after a former General Secretary of the SACP.

The South African Communist Party, along with the ANC, suffered in the struggle against apartheid. It is not just Nelson Mandela, but many other ANC members who were imprisoned for long periods or assassinated, and the SACP also suffered in the same way. In criticizing the policies of the ANC and SACP, it is not my intention to minimize the sacrifices their members and leaders made in the struggle against apartheid. But with regard to the leadership of these groups, it must be kept in mind that those who take it upon themselves to lead the masses are also responsible for where they lead them.

The South African Communist Party had a turbulent early history, but unfortunately was eventually corrupted by the influence of Soviet revisionism, which it followed slavishly for decades. So it fought for and backed the policy of seeking rapprochement with the Western bourgeoisie. And since apartheid fell, the SACP has gone hand-in-hand with the policy of the ANC governments. For example, the renowned Joe Slovo was General-Secretary of the SACP at the time the ANC made its deal with the Afrikaner bourgeoisie. He was not just the leader of the SACP, but a leading member of the ANC, and his supporters boast of his role in obtaining that deal. And he became minister of housing in the first ANC government. The SACP has maintained its close connection with the ANC until this day. The political foundation of the ANC government is the so-called tripartite alliance between the ANC, the SACP, and COSATU.

So it may not be surprising that the SACP has bitterly denounced the strikers at Marikana. In a statement a week and a half ago to COSATU's 11th National Congress, Blade Nzimande, the present head of the SACP and, coincidentally, government Minister for Higher Education and Training, vehemently supports the government crackdown on the strikers, demands the singling out and punishment of the "ring-leaders" of the "misled strikers", and calls for purging the ANC of anyone sympathetic to the strikers or to the expelled former president of the ANC Youth League, Julius Malema. It's a disgusting performance, and it mimics the way dictatorial heads of state-capitalist regimes denounce dissidents as thugs and CIA agents and justify massacring protesters. The SACP's service to the ANC is that it carries out such savagery in "communist" or "socialist" guise.

A true communist party would stand with the masses, not with their oppressors. Its activists would be found among the "ring-leaders" who are being persecuted, and not among the government ministers who are demanding more persecution. The party would have a tripartite alliance with other organizations of the workers and oppressed minorities, not with the multimillionaire leaders of the market-fundamentalist government and sold-out, discredited trade unions.

The sad example of the SACP is one reason why the *Detroit Workers' Voice* stands for a fight against the revisionist parody of communism, that drags the name of socialism and communism through the mud. The SACP isn't an isolated example. In the current issue of the *Communist Voice* [referring to the previous issue], we carry a denunciation by Ukrainian Marxists of the local Ukrainian Stalinists who justified a bloody massacre of strikers that took place in Kazakhstan last year.

**How to get out of this situation**

Well, these are some of the problems that have led to the current situation. Now, how could the South African masses get out of this situation?

There clearly needs to be radical reform of the economy. There was a chance for radical changes when apartheid fell, and with the coming economic and environmental crises there will again be a chance for such change. What is needed is a major restructuring of the economy, the mobilization of the masses into
these changes, thus dealing with unemployment and reconstruction simultaneously, and the replacement of market fundamentalism with major steps of economic planning. But in order to make such changes in the economy, there needs to be a force that will fight for them against both the old and new bourgeoisie. There needs to be a force that will fight the bourgeoisie and the tripartite alliance of the ANC, the SACP, and the COSATU leadership.

This gives additional significance to the current strike wave. It shows that anger among the mass of workers is building up at the present situation, and the ANC and COSATU aren't able to hold it in check. If 100,000 workers are involved in the strike wave today, it is a sign of discontent among millions of the workers and poor of South Africa.

It is an encouraging development that the workers are refusing to be shackled by the COSATU leadership. At Lonmin's and in mining, workers are abandoning NUM and either joining AMCU, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union, or fighting independently of any union. AMCU is viciously denounced by the NUM and COSATU leaders, but is reported by more reliable sources to originate from NUM shop stewards who were expelled for opposing bad settlements of previous strikes. It apparently presents itself as a non-political union, which perhaps is what one might expect in a country where left politics appears to be monopolized by an oppressive government and its backers, and it is also reported to be organizing not just regular workers, but subcontracted workers as well. We don't know enough about the AMCU to have a definite overall assessment of it, but clearly its formation and growth shows a desire for new organization.

The exodus from existing unions and the rise of new attempts at organization is a sign of the possibility of major changes in the workers' movement. There are other currents of protest in South Africa as well. There has been a lot of struggle among the poor against losing their electricity or water rights or having their homes removed. In the region around Durban, this has given rise to the formation in 2005 of an organization of shack-dwellers called Abahlali baseMjondolo. Much will depend on the outcome of this impetus toward new organization.

There is also crisis within the ANC. Just as the rank-and-file was not happy with the abandonment of various of the promises of the Freedom Charter back in the early 1990s, so today there is dissension in the ANC. Meanwhile Julius Malema, one-time president of the ANC Youth League, was removed from his position and expelled from the ANC. He called for nationalizing the mines last year, and has spoken in support of the Lonmin strikers this year, and taken other dissident stands in the ANC. But just as South African President Zuma posed as more representative of the masses than the former president Mbeki, and nothing serious changed with Zuma coming to power, so it's doubtful that Malema represents anything much different from the rest of the ANC leadership. But his popularity reflects substantial discontent.

The South African left faces a crisis of orientation, just as the left does here and around the world. It needs to develop, not just another faction in the ANC, but a political movement with a fundamentally better orientation. The strike wave and other struggles among the masses show that a mass base for the development of an independent workers' movement is growing, a movement based on carrying forward the class struggle. This would be a major step forward for South Africa, and transform post-apartheid politics. We are still a long ways from this happening, but the strike wave is an encouraging development, and perhaps the beginning of a South African awakening.

South Africa is the most economically-developed country in black Africa. What happens in South Africa will have influence far beyond its borders. It's important to learn from what is happening in South Africa and to stand in solidarity with the militant South African strikers.
The fight against imperialism is a sham unless it is directed at all imperialisms and supports the working masses of all countries

BRICS “from below” denounce BRICS “from above”
Activists denounce the BRICS summit
(Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)
in Durban, South Africa

To: Detroit Workers’ Voice mailing list
March 18, 2013
RE: the anti-BRICS counter-summit in Durban, South Africa

The leaders of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) will be holding their fifth annual summit on March 26-27 in Durban, South Africa. But this time a counter-summit is being organized by several groups of activists involved in environmental and social issues.

The counter-summit will be a significant event. It may help spread knowledge of the real nature of the bourgeoisie of the BRICS countries; it will highlight the policies of market fundamentalism, environmental devastation, and support for dictatorial regimes carried out by the BRICS’ governments and BRICS’ bourgeoisies.

There are reformist parties and even militant activists who regard the governments of the BRICS countries as bulwarks against US and Western imperialism, but in fact the BRICS countries are major capitalist regional powers. They are imperialists and would-be imperialists in their own right. It is the working people of the world, not the governments of the lesser imperialist powers, which is the only true basis for a struggle against world imperialism, including US imperialism. Activists who haven’t yet broken decisively with today’s widespread market illusions think that the BRICS countries have policies that are fundamentally different from Western and American neoliberalism. But this is not so. The bourgeoisies and governments of BRICS countries work with the major world capitalist agencies like the IMF and World Bank, and both cooperate and haggle with US and Western imperialism. South Africa, for example, is today one of the most zealously neo-liberal countries in the world, and inequality has skyrocketed there under the rule of the African National Congress. And no matter which group of imperialists dominates the World Bank, the IMF, and the neo-liberal trade agreements, these institutions will remain tools of the bourgeoisie to exploit the masses and enforce the interests of the various imperialist powers.

So help spread news of the anti-BRICS summit and study the record of the bourgeoisie and governments of the BRICS countries! At the same time, we should assess realistically the nature of the different activist trends at the anti-BRICS events. The fact that the counter-summit is promoted as a meeting of “civil society” shows that in South Africa, as elsewhere around the world, there is still a long way to go before we see the development of an independent working class movement. The conference brings together activists who dream of a “bottoms-up” rather than “top down” approach to politics and who are engaged in struggles against some of the great outrages of the current capitalist system. But it mixes together activists oriented to the oppressed masses with NGOs and civil society, and there is still no general consciousness among the militant activists of the need to build a movement independent of all the exploiting bourgeoisies and with a policy distinct from that of the bourgeois reform movements of “civil society”.

Below we reproduce three articles of interest concerning the BRICS countries.

(1) An excerpt from the announcement of the BRICS counter-summit.
(2) An article by Patrick Bond, an activist with the militant wing of the protest movements in South Africa and one of the main organizers of the anti-BRICS summit. He describes some of the crimes of the BRICS governments, and he highlights their hostile class nature by calling the BRICS countries sub-imperialist, not anti-imperialist. We don’t share all his views, and we wouldn’t attribute the failure of various reformist schemes simply to the sabotage by the BRICS, as harmful as that sabotage was. But he provides an overview of BRICS activities, in order to help encourage a more realistic assessment of the BRICS alliance.
(3) Excerpts from an article in our journal Communist Voice on the rise of new imperialisms over the last century.

From the announcement of the BRICS from below counter-summit

Join a civil society summit during the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa heads-of-state summit in Durban, March 22-27 with groundWork, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance and CCS [the Centre for Civil Society]. In Durban, South Africa, five heads of state meet in late March, to assure the rest of Africa that their countries’ corporations are better investors in infrastructure, mining, oil and agriculture than the traditional European and US multinationals. The Brazil-Russia-India-China-SA (BRICS) summit has invited 25 heads of state from Africa, many of whom are notorious tyrants. Given

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how much is at stake, critical civil society must scrutinise the claims, the processes and the outcomes of the BRICS summit and its aftermath. In Durban, three local organisations with a strong track record of advocacy and research on social, economic and ecological justice propose several events between 22-27 March, with the aim of raising critical voices so that long-overdue social, ecological, political, economic and other rights-related concerns are no longer ignored by BRICS leaders.

For more on the counter-summit see http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/brics-from-below%20call%20version%2017%20March.pdf

BRICS bloc’s rising ‘sub-imperialism’: the latest threat to people and planet?

by Patrick Bond, professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and director of the Centre for Civil Society

The heads of state of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) network of governments are coming to Durban, South Africa, in four months, meeting on March 26-27 at the International Convention Centre (ICC), Africa’s largest venue. Given their recent performance, it is reasonable to expect another “1%” summit, wreaking socioeconomic and ecological havoc. And that means it is time for the first BRICS countersummit, to critique top-down “sub-imperialist” bloc formation, and to offer bottom-up alternatives.

After all, we have had some bad experiences at the Durban ICC.

- In 2001, in spite of demands by 10,000 protesters, the United Nations World Conference Against Racism refused to grapple with reparations for slavery and colonialism or with apartheid-Israel’s racism against Palestinians (hence Tel Aviv’s current ethnic cleansing of Gaza goes unpunished).


- The 2003 World Economic Forum’s African regional meeting hastened governments’ supplication to multinational corporate interests in spite of protests.

- In 2011, Durban’s UN COP17 climate summit — better known as the “Conference of Polluters” — featured Washington’s sabotage, with no new emissions cuts and an attempted revival of the non-solution called “carbon trading”, also called “the privatisation of the air”.

Eco-disasters made in Durban

“The Durban Platform [at the 2011 UN Climate Change Sum-
mit] was promising because of what it did not say”, bragged US State Department official Trevor Hous er to the New York Times. “There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.”

The Durban deal squashed poor countries’ ability to defend against climate disaster. With South African foreign minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in the chair, the COP17 confirmed this century’s climate-related deaths of what will be more than 180 million Africans, according to Christian Aid. Already 400,000 people die each year from climate-related chaos due to catastrophes in agriculture, public health and “frankenstorms” like last month’s Hurricane Sandy.

Degeneration of global governance is logical when Washington unites with the BRICS countries, as was first demonstrated three years ago with the Copenhagen Accord [at the 2009 UN Climate Change Summit]. At the COP climate talks, South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, Brazil’s Lula da Silva, China’s Wen Jiabao and India’s Mamnoon Singh joined Barack Obama to foil the Kyoto Protocol’s mandatory emissions cuts, thus confirming that at least 4 degrees Celsius global warming will occur by 2100. “They broke the UN”, concluded Bill McKibben from the climate advocacy movement 350.org.

The negotiators were explicitly acting on behalf of their fossil fuel and extractive industries. Similar cozy ties between Pretoria politicians, London-based mining houses, Johannesburg “black economic empowerment” tycoons and sweetheart trade unions have since been exposed by the police massacre of striking Marikana mineworkers, with another blast against the climate anticipated when fracking soon begins in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal’s Drakensburg Mountains, driven by multinational corporate oil firms led by Shell.

The 2012 Yale and Columbia University Environmental Performance Index showed that aside from Brazil, the other BRICS states are decimating their — and the Earth’s — ecology at the most rapid rate of any group of countries, with Russia and South Africa near the bottom of world stewardship rankings.

Looting Africa

Like Berlin in 1884-85 [the infamous West Africa Conference of 1884-85 in Berlin which accelerated the carving
up of Africa among European colonial powers], the BRICS Durban summit is expected to carve up Africa more efficiently, unburdened — now as then — by what will be derided as “Western” concerns about democracy and human rights. Reading between the lines, its resolutions will:

- support favoured corporations’ extraction and land-grab strategies;
- worsen Africa’s retail-driven deindustrialisation (South Africa’s Shoprite and Makro — soon to be run by Walmart — are already notorious in many capital cities for importing even simple products that could be supplied locally);
- revive failed projects such as Nepad; and
- confirm the financing of both land grabbing and the extension of neocolonial infrastructure through a new “BRICS Development Bank”, likely to be based just north of Johannesburg where the Development Bank of Southern Africa already does so much damage following Washington’s script.

The question is whether in exchange for the Durban summit amplifying such destructive tendencies, which appears certain, can those few of Africa’s elites who may be invited leverage any greater influence in world economic management via the BRICS? With South Africa’s finance minister Pravin Gordhan’s regular critiques of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), there is certainly potential for BRICS to “talk left” about the global-governance democracy deficit.

But watch the “walk right” carefully. In the vote for World Bank president earlier this year, for example, Pretoria’s choice was hard-core Washington ideologue Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Nigerian finance minister who with IMF managing director Christine Lagarde catalysed the Occupy movement’s near revolution in January, with a removal of petrol subsidies. Brasilia chose the moderate economist Jose Antonio Ocampo and Moscow backed Washington’s choice: Jim Yong Kim.

This was a repeat of the prior year’s fiasco in the race for IMF managing director, won by Lagarde in spite of ongoing corruption investigations against her by French courts, because the Third World was divided and conquered. BRICS appeared in both cases as incompetent, unable to even agree on a sole candidate, much less win their case in Washington.

Yet in July, BRICS treasures sent US$100 billion in new capital to the IMF, which was seeking new systems of bail-out for banks exposed in Europe. South Africa’s contribution was only $2 billion, a huge sum for Gordhan to muster against local trade union opposition. Explaining the South African contribution — initially he said it would be only one tenth as large — Gordhan told Moneyweb last year that it was on condition that the IMF became more “nasty” (sic) to desperate European borrowers, as if the Greek, Spanish, Portuguese and Irish poor and working people were not suffering enough.

And the result of this BRICS intervention is that China gains IMF voting power, but Africa actually loses a substantial fraction of its share. Even Gordhan admitted at last month’s Tokyo meeting of the IMF and world Bank that it is likely “the vast majority of emerging and developing countries will lose quota shares — an outcome that will perpetuate the democratic deficit.” And given “the crisis of legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the IMF”, it “is simply untenable” that Africa only has two seats for its 45 member countries.

Likewise, South Africa’s role in Africa has been “nasty”, as confirmed when Nepad was deemed “philosophically spot on” by lead US State Department Africa official Walter Kansteiner in 2003, and foisted privatisation of even basic services on the continent. In a telling incident this year, the Johannesburg parasatal firm Rand Water was forced to leave Ghana after failing — with a Dutch for-profit partner (Aqua Vitens) — to improve Accra’s water supply, as also happened in Maputo, Mozambique, (Saur from Paris) and Dar es Salaam (Biwater from London) in Tanzania.

As a matter of principle, BRICS appears hell bent on promoting the further commodification of life, at a time when the greatest victory won by ordinary Africans in the last decade is under attack: the winning of the Treatment Action Campaign’s demand for affordable access to AIDS medicines, via India’s cheap generic versions of drugs. A decade ago, they cost $10,000 per person per year and only a tiny fraction of desperate people received the medicines. Now, more than 1.5 million South Africans — and millions more in the rest of Africa — get treatment, thus raising the South Africa’s average life expectancy from 52 in 2004 to 60 today, according to reliable statistics released this month.

However, in recent months, Obama has put an intense squeeze on India to cut back on generic medicine R&D and production, as well as making deep cuts in his own government’s aid commitment to fund African healthcare. In Durban, the city that is home to the most HIV+ people in the world, Obama’s move resulted in this year’s closure of AIDS public treatment centres at three crucial sites. One was the city’s McCord Hospital, which ironically was a long-standing ally of the NGO Partners in Health, whose cofounder was Obama’s pick for World Bank president, Jim Kim.

‘Sub-imperialism’?

So we must ask, are the BRICS “anti-imperialist” — or instead, “sub-imperialist”, doing deputy-sheriff duty for global corporations, while controlling their own angry populaces as well as their hinterlands? The eco-destructive, consumerist-centric, over-financialised, climate-frying maldevelopment model throughout the BRICS works very well for corporate profits, but the model is generating crises for 99% of the people and for the planet.

Hence the label sub-imperialist is tempting. As originally formulated during the 1970s, Ruy Mauro Marini argued that his native Brazil is “the best current manifestation of sub-imperialism”, for the following reasons:

- “Doesn’t the Brazilian expansionist policy in Latin America and Africa correspond, beyond the quest for new markets, to an attempt to gain control over sources of raw materials — such as ores and gas in Bolivia, oil in Ecuador and in the
former Portuguese colonies of Africa, the hydroelectric potential in Paraguay — and, more cogently still, to prevent potential competitors such as Argentina from having access to such resources?

- “Doesn’t the export of Brazilian capital, mainly via the state as exemplified by Petrobras, stand out as a particular case of capital export in the context of what a dependent country like Brazil is able to do? Brazil also exports capital through the constant increase of foreign public loans and through capital associated to finance groups which operate in Paraguay, Bolivia and the former Portuguese colonies in Africa, to mention just a few instances.

- “It would be good to keep in mind the accelerated process of monopolization (via concentration and centralization of capital) that has occurred in Brazil over these past years, as well as the extraordinary development of financial capital, mainly from 1968 onward.”

Matters subsequently degenerated on all fronts. In addition to these three criteria — regional economic extraction, “export of capital” (always associated with subsequent imperialist politics) and internal corporate monopolisation and financialisation — there are two additional roles of BRICS if its components are genuinely sub-imperialist. One is to ensure regional geopolitical “stability”: for example, Brasilia’s hated army in Haiti and Pretoria’s deal-making in African hotspots like South Sudan and the Great Lakes countries, for which a $5 billion arms deal serves as military back-up.

The second is to advance the broader agenda of neoliberalism, so as to legitimate continuing market access — typical of South Africa’s Nepad, China, Brazil and India’s attempt to revive the WTO and Brazil’s sabotage of the left project within the “Bank of the South” initiative. As Belgian political economist Éric Toussaint remarked at a World Social Forum panel in Porto Alegre in 2009, “The definition of Brazil as a peripheral imperialist power is not dependent on which political party is in power. The word imperialism may seem excessive because it is associated with an aggressive military policy. But this is a narrow perception of imperialism.”

A richer framing for contemporary imperialism is, according to agrarian scholars Paris Yeros and Sam Moyo, a system “based on the super-exploitation of domestic labour. It was natural, therefore, that, as it grew, it would require external markets for the resolution of its profit realisation crisis.” This notion, derived from Rosa Luxemburg’s thinking a century ago, focuses on how capitalism’s extra-economic coercive capacities loot mutual aid systems and commons facilities, families (women especially), the land, all forms of nature, and the shrinking state — and has also been named “accumulation by dispossession” by David Harvey, and in special cases evoking militarist intervention, Naomi Klein’s “shock doctrine”.

Along with renewed looting are various symptoms of internal crisis and socioeconomic oppressions one can find in many BRICS, including severe inequality, poverty, unemployment, disease, violence (again, especially against women), inadequate education, prohibitions on labour organising and other suffering.

The rising inequality within BRICS — except for Brazil, whose minimum wage increase lowered the extreme Gini coefficient to at least a bit below South Africa’s — is accompanied by worsening social tensions, which in turn is met with worsening political and civil rights violations, such as increased securitisation of societies, militarisation and arms trading, prohibitions on protest, rising media repression and official secrecy, debilitating patriarchy and homophobia, activist jailings and torture, and even massacres (including in Durban, where a notorious police hit squad has killed more than 50 people in recent years, and even after exposure by local media and attempted prosecutions, continues unpunished today).

The forms of sub-imperialism within BRICS are diverse, for as Yeros and Moyo remark, “Some are driven by private blocs of capital with strong state support (Brazil, India); others, like China, include the direct participation of state-owned enterprises; while in the case of South Africa, it is increasingly difficult to speak of an autonomous domestic bourgeoisie, given the extreme degree of de-nationalisation of its economy in the post-apartheid period. The degree of participation in the Western military project is also different from one case to the next although, one might say, there is a ‘schizophrenia’ to all this, typical of ‘sub-imperialism’.”

As a result, all these tendencies warrant opposition from everyone concerned. The damage is going to be ever easier to observe, the more that BRICS leaders prop up the IMF’s pro-austerity financing and catalyse a renewed round of World Trade Organization attacks; the more a new BRICS Development Bank exacerbates the World Bank’s human, ecological and economic messes; the more Africa becomes a battleground for internecine conflicts between sub-imperialists intent on rapid minerals and oil extraction (as is common in central Africa); and the more specific companies targeted by victims require unified campaigning and boycotts to generate solidarity-counter-pressure, whether its Brazil’s Vale and Petrobras, or South Africa’s Anglo or BHP Billiton (albeit with London and Melbourne HQs), or India’s Tata or Arcelor-Mittal, or Chinese state-owned firms and Russian energy corporations.

One opportunity to link issues and connect the dots between campaigns so as to find a unifying anti-subimperialism that aligns with our critique of global capitalism, is within a Durban uncivil-society counter-summit on March 23-27, 2013. Like the rest of South Africa, Durban has witnessed an upsurge of socioeconomic conflict in recent months, and it is incumbent upon visitors to understand where tensions are emerging so that similar processes in the other BRICS are not left isolated.

An overall objective is to “rebuild BRICS from below”, so the usual “globalisation-from-the-middle” talk shops — featuring speeches by petit-bourgeois NGO strategists and radical intellectuals (like myself) — must be balanced through community-based teach-ins where reality tours and sharing between oppressed peoples take precedence.

One of the most critical sites is South Durban, where a $30 billion project to destroy two black neighbourhoods (Clairwood and Merebank) through 10-fold expansion of shipping, freight and petrochemical activity is being vigorously contested. The
narratives of the communities resisting go beyond “not in my back yard” reasoning, and instead much more widely question the extractivist, export-oriented model of mal-

development that has seduced the current South African government, as well as other BRICS.

Anti-imperialism and the Arab Spring

_PRESENTATION BY JOSEPH GREEN AT THE PANEL ON_
"WHAT IS IMPERIALISM? (WHAT NOW?)"
_AT THE PLATYPUS CONVENTION, APRIL 6, 2013"

The struggles of the Arab Spring have led some to ask, should we side with anti-imperialism or should we back the anti-fascist struggle? But this is a false dichotomy. There is neither real anti-imperialism or anti-fascism without the masses. I would call such supposed anti-imperialism “non-class anti-imperialism”, a would-be anti-imperialism that attributes everything to the maneuvers of this or that Western power or corporation, but somehow misses what’s going on among the masses.

Non-class anti-imperialism is very widespread in the left. Over the last few decades, it [non-class anti-imperialism] has repeatedly degenerated into support for oppressive tyrannies, prettification of new imperialisms, and despair at the prospects of mass struggle. Some groups even regard that the Taliban is waging an anti-imperialist struggle in Afghanistan. All this has threatened to discredit anti-imperialism in the eyes of millions upon millions of people.

The non-class anti-imperialists argue that once a regime comes into contradiction with the US government, even a regime that has worked closely with US imperialism before, then the internal situation is irrelevant. It argues that, “didn’t Lenin say in his article Socialism and War that it didn’t matter who attacked first, India or Britain, that it would be a war of aggression on Britain’s part and of defense on India’s”? Is there any reference here to the internal situation in India?

But Lenin argued that a great revolutionary wave was spreading across India and elsewhere in Asia, a gigantic movement which imperialism was seeking to suppress. Millions and millions of oppressed people were standing up against old social relations and national oppression, and this had been going on for decades. War was the continuation of politics by other means. So since a movement of liberation was taking place in India and elsewhere, since the long-standing issue was the democratic movement and the fight against colonialism, any war should be judged in that light. In that light, such things as who struck first were not particularly relevant.

So the issue today is, what is the long-standing situation of decades that has led to the Arab Spring and such things as the uprisings against Qaddafi and the Assad regime. It’s the people of the region standing up to demand a say in their lives. The situation now is different from the revolutionary wave in the immediate years after World War II. Then in the Middle East there were a series of struggles that brought colonies to independence or overthrew monarchies. In some countries working class parties fought for influence. These struggles changed the face of the Middle East and North Africa and brought economic development, albeit it was capitalist modernization, but in country after country the resulting governments became long-lasting dictatorships that humiliated the working people and destroyed their organizations or made these organizations into adjuncts of the government and ruling bourgeoisie. These governments spoke in terms of the old ideals and aspirations of the people and even in terms of socialism — but the old revolutionary movement was dead. Typical of the reality is that the supposedly anti-imperialist regimes in Syria and Libya cooperated with US and British imperialism in the torture of each other’s prisoners.

What is going on today is neither a recolonization of the region, nor a struggle with an anti-imperialist banner. It’s the masses seeking the right to breathe in their own countries. It is not the result of the outside manipulation of foreign powers, although these powers are all seeking to either smash the movement or use it to their interests. But no upsurge against these regimes could have succeeded without the outside reactionaries and imperialists being divided among themselves.

Perhaps this would make it appear that we are facing a wave of democratic revolutions in the Middle East, like those sweeping Asia earlier. But this is not so. We are facing important struggles that may end the decades of political stagnation. But no matter how bitter and protracted the fighting, they are not democratic social revolutions of the old type.

What is taking place in the Arab world are democratizations or liberalizations, as took place in the Philippines with the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship, as took place in Mexico with the end of the one-party rule of the PRI, as took place in Eastern Europe and Russia, with the downfall of state-capitalism. These were revolutions in the narrow sense. But in these countries, capitalist development had generally proceeded far enough so that there was no longer the basis for the old-style democratic social revolution that eliminated feudalism or semi-feudalism in the countryside, and yet the working class was far too disorganized for there to be the possibility of a social revolution. The democratic social revolution was a matter of the past; the socialist revolution the matter of a future still in the distance.

This affects the character of these movements, where over and over again the resulting regimes are a disappointment. In these struggles, the working class may fight, but it was politically disorganized, as it is around the world. Nowhere in the world yet does the working class lead such struggles. So the result of these struggles, if these struggles are successful, is that the political situation may open up to this or that extent, but the regimes may even carry out market fundamentalist measures. The masses may achieve some political rights, but not economic liberation.

So these are not the grand liberating revolutions of one’s dreams, but liberalizations with the possibility of an intensified

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class struggle taking place. Does this mean the struggles are useless? Not from the Marxist standpoint. For Marxism, the class struggle is the path towards organizing the working class and preparing for socialist revolution. From the point of view of utopianism, these struggles have failed. From the point of view of helping the working class organize, these struggles are essential. If one really believes the working class and mass revolution are the motors of history, then these struggles are our struggles, the struggles of our comrades. If one disregards these struggles, one becomes a utopian or worse, an unwitting backer of rival imperialisms.

This situation has been a test of the political stands and theoretical views of the various trends on the left.

Some supported those struggles they thought had the possibility of bringing the liberation of the working class. The Trotskyists, for example, had to do this as part of their theory of so-called “permanent revolution”. Various of these groups would declare that these struggles either had to bring the working class to power, or they would accomplish nothing. Such declarations might appear exciting at the height of the mass upsurges, but they lead to fits of depression as these struggles continued and disappointed the Trotskyist groups. The Trotskyist theory had a marked utopian flavor, either full liberation now, or forget it.

Let’s also look at the standpoint of an ordinary pure democrat. I know this doesn’t seem like a very radical thing to consider, but it’s instructive. Marwan Bishara is a senior political analyst at Al Jazeera, and he wrote a book called the Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolution. This book is an expression of a certain stage of the Arab Awakening, namely the period of democratic euphoria, and he is passionate about how what he calls “today’s revolutions” are completing the previous wave of struggles: in his terms, it’s liberating the people, while, he says, the earlier struggles liberated the land. He has no idea that the class, social, and political alliances that are bringing the Arab Spring are inevitably going to breakdown, and lead to a period of struggles, haggling, and popular depression, nor does he realize how serious is the threat of very horrible setbacks, such as periods of fundamentalist government. He has no idea that democracy and liberalization lead to class struggle, and that the more thorough the democracy and the more successful the working class is in utilizing this democracy, the more intense the resulting struggles.

From the standpoint of the political trend I support, it was clear from the start that, in the Arab Spring, everywhere different class factions opposed the old regimes, everywhere different class interests were represented. It was also clear that these struggles did not have an anti-imperialist banner, and that their need to resort to a certain amount of Western imperialist military support was a danger to them. We neither glorified their nature as the great revolution, nor were we disillusioned when the mixed nature of the results of these struggles became apparent. We continued to expose Western imperialist motives, but we also recognized the legitimacy of the insurgent people utilizing differences among the foreign powers.

This mixed situation is characteristic of the struggles of today. The working-class movement is disorganized and in crisis around the world, and the working masses divided by a multitude of differences. In this situation, the major struggles that break out are not dominated by a revolutionary viewpoint. But to abandon these struggles means to make a mockery of belief in the class struggle. So we have a choice: either utopianism, abstaining from all struggle until somehow the one great revolutionary struggle appears. Or knowing where the working class interest lies in these struggles, using these struggles to have the working class learn the interests and features of the different classes and become class-conscious.

But non-class anti-imperialism judges these struggles not by their effect on the masses, but on how they affect the relations between the different imperialist powers. It doesn’t realize that the temporary gains or losses of this or that big power or this or that multinational corporation may be the most minor aspect of the struggle — the main aspect is how far these struggles open a pathway to the class struggle.

Moreover the non-class anti-imperialists also misunderstand the nature of imperialism today. It’s not enough to say that imperialism still exists today. One has to be able to see what’s changed in the world situation, and how the basic features of imperialism remain despite this.

Several of these changes are of particular importance for today. For the sake of brevity, let’s deal with just one — the rise of new imperial powers. The non-class anti-imperialists believe that only countries which were imperialist a century ago can still be imperialist today. They ignore the rise of new imperialist powers and would-be imperialist powers. They may look towards the governments of the BRICS — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — as some type of bulwark against US imperialism.

But the working masses of the BRICS face the opposition of the governments and bourgeoisie of these countries. This has been dramatized by what happened at the latest of the annual meetings of the BRICS governments, this time in Durban South Africa late last month. Activists from the social movements in South Africa organized the “BRICS from below” countersummit against the “BRICS from above” meeting of BRICS governments. One of the main organizers of this countersummit was the South African activist Patrick Bond, who describes the BRICS countries as “sub-imperialist”, not anti-imperialist. He describes in detail examples of how these countries join in world imperialism and act like imperialists. This counter-summit was billed as a meeting of civil society, which shows that the South African movement is still far from an independent working class standpoint, but it is an important exposure of what the BRICS really are.

It’s not just the BRICS bourgeoisie who have gone imperialist. Any bourgeoisie of a country with some advantages allowing it to exercise influence has sought to become its own regional power and join the dance of monopoly powers. The strategic position and oil money of the Arab world has financed these imperial strivings in the larger or more powerful countries.

Failing to recognize the new imperialisms and backing one imperialist or regional capitalist power against another is a travesty of anti-imperialism. We live in the most powerful imperialist country, which is still the world’s only superpower. But the only way to undermine US imperialism is to build support for the development of working class struggle around the world. What aids this, ultimately aids the anti-imperialist struggle. What aids other imperialist powers seeking to hold down the working class, retards this.
A century ago, in the years leading up to World War I, the struggle by the Great Powers to enlarge their vast colonial holdings led to wide talk about a period of imperialism. This was a period of renewed international tensions, as each Great Power sought to encroach on the empires of its rivals. The ensuing disaster of World War I led to the development and spread of the Leninist theory of imperialism. It emphasized that the cause of colonial wars and other rivalries of the major powers was the development of monopoly capitalism; that monopoly capitalism was paving the way economically towards a new system that would supplant capitalism; and that working class revolution would be the midwife of this new system.

There have been great changes in the world situation since then. The major world colonial empires have collapsed. International governmental organizations such as the UN, the WTO, and the IMF, regulating, to some extent, some aspects of international economics and politics, have taken on an unprecedented prominence.

Some say that this makes the Leninist theory outdated, or even means that imperialism no longer exists, although there’s much less of that talk since the Afghan and Iraqi wars. But a closer look shows that, on the contrary, the present world tensions verify precisely the Leninist theory of imperialism, which pointed to monopoly capitalism as the economic base for the massive bloodshed and militarism and other features of imperialism. The old empires are gone, but monopoly capitalism remains, and sure enough, so are wars, relations of domination and subordination among countries, and bitter exploitation of weak countries by strong. The old empires are gone, but empire-building of a new sort remains; today even many bourgeois ideologues talk about the present imperial system.

The collapse of the colonial empires

Today, as regards to colonies, the picture of the world is quite different from what it was on the eve of World War I. The vast world wave of anti-colonial revolt in the twentieth century led to the dissolution of the old colonial empires. Among the former colonies and semi-colonies there has been an explosion of capitalist development. Some of these countries have become major capitalist countries and perhaps regional powers, and may deserve to be called imperialist countries. As a result, today the majority of the world’s population doesn’t live in colonies or semi-colonies but in capitalist countries and regional powers, including lesser and would-be imperialist countries.

Thus China, a former semi-colony, has become not only an imperialist power, but a Great Power. Its economy is taking on a greater and greater world significance; it is competing with the other world powers for influence in Africa, Latin America, and Asia; and it is a nuclear power which is continually strengthening and modernizing its military. The former colony of India, too, has developed rapidly. It has its own monopoly capital; its big bourgeoisie makes major investments in other countries including the most developed ones; it is a nuclear power; and it is continually striving to modernize and strengthen its armed forces.

If China and India were the only former members of the colonial and semicolonial world that had become imperialist, this would still represent a major change in the world. They may be only two among about two hundred presently-independent countries, but they have over a third of the world’s population between them, and three-fifths of Asia’s population.

But in fact capitalism has developed rapidly in most of the former colonies and semi-colonies. In any of these countries which have a certain weight or power or geopolitical advantage, the bourgeoisie generally strives to become a regional power in its own right (Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq in the 1980s, etc.), or to have its own place in the imperialist world. How this striving is manifested depends on the history of these countries, how far they are within the spheres of influence of more powerful countries, and how powerful they themselves are. On a world scale, these countries are subordinate to the main imperialist powers, but they seek to climb the scale of influence and power.

Today there are relatively few outright colonies left. The overwhelming majority of the world’s people live in imperialist powers or subordinate capitalist countries. Moreover, among the subordinate capitalist countries, a disproportionate role is occupied by the more powerful ones, such as the would-be imperialist countries and the regional powers. No doubt, there are also a large number of people in small and very weak countries, but the overall picture of the world situation has changed. The great anti-colonial movements of the past have radically revised it. And this new picture has changed the prospects for how revolution will take place, for it has brought the class struggle more to the fore.

It is often objected that the existence of poverty and growing inequality in the former colonies and semi-colonies, including the very largest and most powerful of them such as China and India, shows that their status hasn’t really changed. Since they have not achieved decent living standards for all their people, it is held that their development must not be real, but sham. The significance of the growth of an ambitious local bourgeoisie with its own predatory interests is overlooked.

But capitalist development has always been accompanied by the growth of insecurity and inequality. It has gone hand-in-hand with the development of mass devastation in many of these countries; and the growth of the capitalist world economy has been accompanied by increasing inequality between different countries and regions, as well as inside each country. Thus the growing gap between the countryside and the city in both China and India does not disprove the existence of economic development, but is a typical result of capitalist development. Meanwhile, some countries and regions push forward, and some fall back. The East Asian tigers have grown rapidly. But the last
two decades of neo-liberal reforms have seen the economic ravaging of much of Africa, and the stagnation of much of Latin America.

The continuation of imperialism

The old colonial empires are mainly gone, but this does not mean imperialism is gone. The colonial empires were only one feature of imperialism. Other characteristic features of imperialism remain. The domination of great powers over weaker countries remains. One country, the US, is the world’s sole remaining superpower, with the ability to apply pressure throughout the entire world. Meanwhile the US and other imperialist powers carve out particular spheres of influence in various regions of the world. Thus the world is still caught in a net of domination and subordination between countries.

Among the features of this continuing imperialism are the following:

- spheres of influence;
- wars and militarism;
- the world governmental organizations;
- the rape of the world by finance capital and large corporations; and
- the tendency towards reaction.

Thus capitalism hasn’t become civilized. As it has gone into the twenty-first century, it has retained the basic features of the old imperialism, albeit with certain modifications.
Anti-imperialism and the Arab Spring

Presentation by Joseph Green at the panel on "What is Imperialism? (What Now?)" at the Platypus Convention, April 6, 2013

The struggles of the Arab Spring have led some to ask, should we side with anti-imperialism or should we back the anti-fascist struggle? But this is a false dichotomy. There is neither real anti-imperialism or anti-fascism without the masses. I would call such supposed anti-imperialism "non-class anti-imperialism", a would-be anti-imperialism that attributes everything to the maneuvers of this or that Western power or corporation, but somehow misses what's going on among the masses.

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So the issue today is, what is the long-standing situation of decades that has led to the Arab Spring and such things as the uprisings against Qaddafi and the Assad regime. It's the people of the region standing up to demand a say in their lives. The situation now is different from the revolutionary wave in the immediate years after World War II. Then in the Middle East there were a series of struggles that brought colonies to independence or overthrew monarchies. In some countries working class parties fought for influence. These struggles changed the face of the Middle East and North Africa and brought economic development, albeit it was capitalist modernization, but in country after country the resulting governments became long-lasting dictatorships that humiliated the working people and destroyed their organizations or made these organizations into adjuncts of the government and ruling bourgeoisie. These governments spoke in terms of the old ideals and aspirations of the people and even in terms of socialism — but the old revolutionary movement was dead. Typical of the reality is that the supposedly anti-imperialist regimes in Syria and Libya cooperated with US and British imperialism in the torture of each other's prisoners.

What is going on today is neither a recolonization of the region, nor a struggle with an anti-imperialist banner. It's the masses seeking the right to breathe in their own countries. It is not the result of the outside manipulation of foreign powers, although these powers are all seeking to either smash the movement or use it to their interests. But no upsurge against these regimes could have succeeded without the outside reactionaries and imperialists being divided among themselves.

Perhaps this would make it appear that we are facing a wave of democratic revolutions in the Middle East, like those sweeping Asia earlier. But this is not so. We are facing important struggles that may end the decades of political stagnation. But no matter how bitter and protracted the fighting, they are not democratic social revolutions of the old type.

What is taking place in the Arab world are democratizations or liberalizations, as took place in the Philippines with the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship, as took place in Mexico with the end of the one-party rule of the PRI, as took place in Eastern Europe and Russia, with the downfall of state-capitalism. These were revolutions in the narrow sense. But in these countries, capitalist development had generally proceeded far enough so that there was no longer the basis for the old-style democratic social revolution that eliminated feudalism or semi-feudalism in the countryside, and yet the working class was far too disorganized for there to be the possibility of a social revolution. The democratic social revolution was a matter of the past; the socialist revolution the matter of a future still in the distance.

This affects the character of these movements, where over and over again the resulting regimes are a disappointment. In these struggles, the working class may fight, but it was politically disorganized, as it is around the world. Nowhere in the world yet does the working class lead such struggles. So the result of these struggles, if these struggles are successful, is that the political situation may open up to this or that extent, but the regimes may even carry out market fundamentalist measures. The masses may achieve some political rights, but not economic liberation.

So these are not the grand liberating revolutions of one's dreams, but liberalizations with the possibility of an intensified class struggle taking place. Does this mean the struggles are useless? Not from the Marxist standpoint. For Marxism, the class struggle is the path towards organizing the working class and preparing for socialist revolution. From the point of view of utopianism, these struggles have failed. From the point of view of helping the working class organize, these struggles are essential. If one really believes the working class and mass revolution are the motors of history, then these struggles are our struggles, the struggles of our comrades. If one disregards these struggles, one becomes a utopian or worse, an unwitting backer of rival imperialisms.

This situation has been a test of the political stands and
Some supported those struggles they thought had the possibility of bringing the liberation of the working class. The Trotskyists, for example, had to do this as part of their theory of so-called "permanent revolution". Various of these groups would declare that these struggles either had to bring the working class to power, or they would accomplish nothing. Such declarations might appear exciting at the height of the mass upsurges, but they lead to fits of depression as these struggles continued and disappointed the Trotskyist groups. The Trotskyist theory had a marked utopian flavor, either full liberation now, or forget it.

Let's also look at the standpoint of an ordinary pure democrat. I know this doesn't seem like a very radical thing to consider, but it's instructive. Marwan Bishara is a senior political analyst at Al Jazeera, and he wrote a book called the Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolution. This book is an expression of a certain stage of the Arab Awakening, namely the period of democratic euphoria, and he is passionate about how what he calls "today's revolutions" are completing the previous wave of struggles: in his terms, it's liberating the people, while, he says, the earlier struggles liberated the land. He has no idea that the class, social, and political alliances that are bringing the Arab Spring are inevitably going to breakdown, and lead to a period of struggles, haggling, and popular depression, nor does he realize how serious is the threat of very horrible setbacks, such as periods of fundamentalist government. He has no idea that democracy and liberalization lead to class struggle, and that the more thorough the democracy and the more successful the working class is in utilizing this democracy, the more intense the resulting struggles.

From the standpoint of the political trend I support, it was clear from the start that, in the Arab Spring, everywhere different class factions opposed the old regimes, everywhere different class interests were represented. It was also clear that these struggles did not have an anti-imperialist banner, and that their need to resort to a certain amount of Western imperialist military support was a danger to them. We neither glorified their nature as the great revolution, nor were we disillusioned when the mixed nature of the results of these struggles became apparent. We continued to expose Western imperialist motives, but we also recognized the legitimacy of the insurgent people utilizing differences among the foreign powers.

This mixed situation is characteristic of the struggles of today. The working-class movement is disorganized and in crisis around the world, and the working masses divided by a multitude of differences. In this situation, the major struggles that break out are not dominated by a revolutionary viewpoint. But to abandon these struggles means to make a mockery of belief in the class struggle. So we have a choice: either utopianism, abstaining from all struggle until somehow the one great revolutionary struggle appears. Or knowing where the working class interest lies in these struggles, using these struggles to have the working class learn the interests and features of the different classes and become class-conscious.

But non-class anti-imperialism judges these struggles not by their effect on the masses, but on how they affect the relations between the different imperialist powers. It doesn't realize that the temporary gains or losses of this or that big power or this or that multinational corporation may be the most minor aspect of the struggle — the main aspect is how far these struggles open a pathway to the class struggle.

Moreover the non-class anti-imperialists also misunderstand the nature of imperialism today. It's not enough to say that imperialism still exists today. One has to be able to see what's changed in the world situation, and how the basic features of imperialism remain despite this.

Several of these changes are of particular importance for today. For the sake of brevity, let's deal with just one — the rise of new imperial powers. The non-class anti-imperialists believe that only countries which were imperialist a century ago can still be imperialist today. They ignore the rise of new imperialist powers and would-be imperialist powers. They may look towards the governments of the BRICS — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — as some type of bulwark against US imperialism.

But the working masses of the BRICS face the opposition of the governments and bourgeoisies of these countries. This has been dramatized by what happened at the latest of the annual meetings of the BRICS governments, this time in Durban South Africa last month. Activists from the social movements in South Africa organized the "BRICS from below" countersummit against the "BRICS from above" meeting of BRICS governments. One of the main organizers of this countersummit was the South African activist Patrick Bond, who describes the BRICS countries as "sub-imperialist", not anti-imperialist. He describes in detail examples of how these countries join in world imperialism and act like imperialists. This counter-summit was billed as a meeting of civil society, which shows that the South African movement is still far from an independent working class standpoint, but it is an important exposure of what the BRICS really are.

It's not just the BRICS bourgeoisies who have gone imperialist. Any bourgeoisie of a country with some advantages allowing it to exercise influence has sought to become its own regional power and join the dance of monopoly powers. The strategic position and oil money of the Arab world has financed these imperial strivings in the larger or more powerful countries.

Failing to recognize the new imperialisms and backing one imperialist or regional capitalist power against another is a travesty of anti-imperialism. We live in the most powerful imperialist country, which is still the world's only superpower. But the only way to undermine US imperialism is to build support for the development of working class struggle around the world. What aids this, ultimately aids the anti-imperialist struggle. What aids other imperialist powers seeking to hold down the working class, retards this...
Some articles from the *Communist Voice* on the Leninist theory of imperialism in the 21st century

Imperialism is still an ugly reality, and US imperialism still the dominant world power. Leninism shows the connection of true anti-imperialist struggle with the class struggle, while "non-class anti-imperialism" has repeatedly degenerated into support for oppressive tyrannies, prettification of new imperialisms, and despair at the prospects of mass struggle.

(The articles listed below are available at www.communistvoice.org/00Imperialism.html, www.communistvoice.org/00Iraq.html, and www.communistvoice.org/00ArabSpring.html.)

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**On the sub-imperialism of the BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa):
the "BRICS from below” counter-summit in Durban, South Africa denounces the 5th annual "BRICS from above” summit of March 26-27, 2013

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**The American Left and the Arab Awakening** (2012)

Why activists should support the Syrian uprising (2012)

Leninism and the Arab Spring (2011)

Against left-wing doubts about the democratic movements in Syria and Libya (2011)

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The war-like nature of imperialism is unchanged after the collapse of the old colonial empires (2007)

The Leninist theory of imperialism and the 21st century world (2006)


Imperialism in light of the Afghan war (2002)

The US = #1 terrorist (2002)

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Against both imperialism and fundamentalism! (2008)

US imperialism, get out of Iraq!
/For the organization of the Iraqi working masses! (2003)


Anti-war slogans in the light of the outcome of the war including the fiasco of "military but (supposedly) not political support" for Saddam Hussein (2003)

The debate on the "defend Iraq" slogan (articles from the first and 2nd Iraq war, from the *Communist Voice* and the *Workers' Advocate*)

The third side, the Iraqi masses: Opposing both sides in the war crisis (2002)

The socialist debate on the Taliban (Part 1):
Trotskyism slips on the supposed anti-imperialism of the Taliban (2002)

The socialist debate on the Taliban (Part 2): Anti-imperialism and the class struggle including discussion of Trotsky's mistake about the Emperor of Ethiopia and Stalin's mistake about the Emir of Afghanistan (2002)

For more about *Communist Voice*:
visit www.communistvoice.org, or write mail@communistvoice.org.
In this issue we include three guest articles from activists who have submitted material to Communist Voice for publication. These activists have varying viewpoints, but are united with us in opposition to the exploiting capitalist order. One is William Hathaway, who gives an overview of the situation facing us and what must be done. Another is Christopher Helali, who denounces the present order and its opportunist apologists, but says little about the nature of the present limited struggles that face us today. And there is also a satire by Timothy Bearly, a writer known to the readers of the anti-establishment journal of working-class literature, Struggle magazine. Bearly’s lively story ridicules the free-market ideology of libertarianism, but it doesn’t deal with the struggle that inevitably takes place over how government programs are carried out. We are faced with a struggle not just over whether there will be government social and environmental programs, but what influence the masses will have over them, whether they will be privatized or otherwise directly captured by big business, and who will benefit from them. Also, the prologue, in setting the stage for the satire, presents matters as seen through the ordinary media commentary, with the Democrats and Republicans being extremes of left and right. Actually, they are the twin parties of big business. Bearly has written us that he is agreement with both these points.

The Last Days of the Lilliputians

by William Hathaway

In Gulliver’s Travels the tiny Lilliputians attacked the much larger Gulliver while he was sleeping and tied him to the ground with thousands of threads. In a similar way the ruling elite have tied the working class in bondage. Small in number but great in power, the elite have designed myriad mechanisms of control to hold the much larger working class down and force it to work for them. These include institutions such as mainstream politics, media, schools, labor unions, police, courts, military, and patriarchal gender roles. They also include emotionally laden concepts such as rugged individualism, a false image of socialism, and the very way we conceive of social class.

This last, the encultured view of ourselves, robs us of our class identity. Very few of us consider ourselves working class. The term has been made to seem a musty relic of the nineteenth century, synonymous with lower class, a disreputable band of losers who are to be feared and perhaps pitied, but certainly not to be identified with. Instead we are offered a hierarchy of many classes: upper, upper middle, middle, lower middle, and last and certainly least, the lumpen lower. Within these we are fragmented further by conflicting differences: ethnic, religious, gender, life style. We’re supposed to identify with our niche and our job and to strive to move up or at least not slip down in the hierarchy. But more and more of us are slipping down, losing the few securities we had. In our bewildered anger we find allies only within our isolated niche, so our struggles are ineffective.

Almost all of us are in fact working class. Everyone in the world who has to work for someone else for the essentials of living is working class. Only when we join together in solidarity will we succeed.

The elite have also fragmented us geographically. The most exploited are far away from the centers of power and thus invisible to us except for media images of illegal aliens storming our borders or insurgents attacking our soldiers. They live under the heel of authoritarian governments held in power by the rich nations and are forced to work under deplorable conditions. The wealth extracted from their labor has enabled the corporations to pay their employees in the home country better wages, thus minimizing discontent here and stimulating consumption of their products.

That economic arrangement is changing, however, as global competition intensifies. Selling in the world market has become more important than selling in the home country. Competing globally requires low prices, so corporations are slashing wages and benefits. The international working class is being leveled. Our task now is to unite and overthrow the elite that rules us all.

This elite is composed of many nationalities and has many internal conflicts. They even make war on each other when economics demands it. But they always recognize their overriding interests as a class, and they will do everything in their considerable power to defend those interests. We, the workers of the world, need to recognize and defend our own class interests with as much determination as our rulers.

They have designed a political system in the USA that ensures their power monopoly. The candidates of both major parties represent their interests. Through corporate financing, winner-take-all elections, ballot-access laws, and slanted media coverage, they effectively exclude alternatives.

To break free of their political control and build genuine democracy, we must delegitimize in particular the Democratic Party, which exists to channel potentially radical discontent into dead-end streets. The Democratic Party is the graveyard of social movements, capturing people’s hopes for fundamental changes, then burying them. It produces only superficial reforms that strengthen capitalism.

Each of us should examine the parties and organizations on the left, find one that matches our orientation, and actively support it. Just being angry at the system isn’t enough. Unless we are organized and militant, a viable alternative to the capitalist parties won’t emerge.

Labor unions, like the Democratic Party, have become merely reformist. They have been purged of any anti-capitalist leadership and now serve the same function on the economic front that the Democrats serve on the political front: to convince the working class to accept the dictates of capital. Union
leadership collaborates with employers to worsen the conditions of their members. They have become functionaries of capitalism and are richly rewarded for it. Workers are going to have to build an independent base of power that will throw out this bureaucracy and militantly confront bosses worldwide.

The reformism pushed by the Democratic Party and the labor unions is reinforced by the liberal media. They foster the idea that the system is basically good but just has some problems that need to be fixed. This is appealing because it’s easy. Instead of revolution to replace the system, we just need to repair it.

Reforms have in the past improved a few conditions. Social Security helped stave off abject poverty in old age, and Medicare helped protect a family’s savings from catastrophic health costs. From the 1950s to the ’70s unions were able to force through higher wages and better working conditions in many industries. But these hard-fought reforms are being reversed now because of capitalism’s need to reduce prices to compete with emerging industrial powers such as China and India. The pressure of international competition is being shifted onto us, the workers, and the Democrats and unions are implementing that. In this new economic reality, reformism has become a coward’s dream, a way of avoiding the unpleasantness of protracted struggle. We need to abandon its delusion and prepare to fight for fundamental changes that will replace oligarchic capitalism with democratic socialism.

Another thread that binds us is the image of socialism that has been burned into our brains. We are continually persuaded that it means brutal dictatorship, concentration camps, no freedom, a slave state. To counter this, we need to criticize the regimes of the Soviet Union and China and point out that they weren’t socialist. The totalitarian tradition in their cultures and constant attack by the capitalist nations kept them from achieving anything close to real socialism. In many cases the government took over as the exploitative boss, and the workers had little power. Real socialism means economic democracy, where we decide together how our economic life will be organized. It puts the resources and productive capacity of the world in the hands of its people, who use them to meet human needs rather than to generate private profits for a few owners.

We are educated to serve the system: to be obedient, to respect authority, to fit into a hierarchy. We are channeled into learning skills the corporations need, and our labor has become just another commodity. Our deepest interests and talents often remain undeveloped, unrecognized even by ourselves. This won’t change until students, parents, teachers, and other workers come together and educate one another to take power.

The mass media exist to control the masses by shaping our perceptions of reality. The pap they feed us switches off our brains, so we can’t analyze society as a system. Instead of thought, we are offered a dazzling array of personal emotions and sensory stimulation to distract us from the bleak reality of our lives.

Their entertainment and news fixate us on physical violence, so we don’t perceive the structural violence that causes it. We get lurid, fear-arousing accounts of violence committed by ghetto youths and Muslim guerrillas accompanied with commentaries calling for tough measures to combat these vicious berserkers. We get no accounts of the structural violence of poverty and oppression that capitalism and imperialism have created there.

It’s this built-in structural violence that generates the physical violence.

The corporate media exist also to stimulate greed and consumption. Capitalism divides us from one another, and the isolation imposed by this false separation generates insecurity and a sense of incompleteness. It creates hollow personalities craving to fill an inner emptiness, then it comes to the rescue by promising satisfaction through consumption. First it causes the void, then convinces us to fill it with things -- beautiful, fascinating, sexy things. Lots of them. And so much the better that they never really fill our needs, because then we need more of them.

Alternative publications such as Communist Voice are awakening people from the stupor induced by this mainstream propaganda. They deserve our support.

To escape from the mental manipulation, we must strive for inner self-sufficiency so we won’t need all that garbage the media is selling us. This self-sufficiency has its basis in our shared humanity, and if we tune in to that, the superficial substitutes of commercial products and entertainment will lose their appeal. A good way to combat such conditioning is a consumer strike. Buy as little as possible. Turn off the television. By overcoming our need for entertainment, we can develop our own authentic creativity. When we’re not consuming as much, the planet will breathe a sigh of relief. Instead of hiding behind fashion, jewelry, and cosmetics, let’s face the world as we are and let the beauty of our defiance show.

The media create images and myths that reinforce the existing ideologies. Rugged individualism, for example, validates the “every man for himself” ethos of capitalism. The belief that we are isolated beings striving for our own gratification is an axiom of our society. Men are particularly enamored of it, taught to identify with the mountain man, the lone wolf, the entrepreneur.

The separations between people are easy to see: each of us inhabit a different body. Our connections are much more fundamental, but they are invisible, so a shallow culture like ours doesn’t perceive them. We can overcome this by centered ourselves in our connectedness and acting from it. In our lives and in our art we can demonstrate the deeper commonality that underlies our surface separations. Our genuine individuality can be best developed within this context.

Reinforcing traditional masculinity is one of the chief ways in which the elite seek to keep the working class on its side. They exploit the fact that many men cling to maleness as the last power left to them. Working-class men have almost no say over their work lives; machismo has become their only realm of agency. This is exploited by elements of the media, who portray leftists as intent on rendering traditional males extinct. Admittedly, there’s a grain of truth in this. We need to resist traditions of dominance and aggression, whether practiced by men or women. The real attack on working-class men, though, is coming not from leftists but from economic forces that are increasingly constricting their lives and limiting their possibilities down to low paying, exhausting jobs. The rage this generates in them is deflected by the media towards leftists, feminists, and minorities, who are actually the core opposition to those economic forces.

We need to show traditional men that socialism will give them economic security and power in the work place. When they have that, they won’t need to dominate their wives and children.
If they persist in doing so, society has to prevent them from that. The dominator mentality is a pathology we must overcome. Gender politics by itself won’t build socialism. In fact in many cases it ends up serving capitalism. But gender studies can help break the patriarchal mold that keeps producing the same authoritarian personality type. It opens up new possibilities and fosters psychological diversity. By showing that our categories of feminine and masculine aren’t natural but cultural, it calls into question the naturalness of other institutions. It helps us see that capitalism also is not an inherent necessity but rather a product of social forces open to change. Gender subversion can lead to political subversion.

The enforcement mechanisms of society -- military, police, and courts -- are the bottom line of oppression. All three are licensed to kill and do so regularly. The military are the spear carriers of capitalism. Their job is to defend and expand the empire, and they slaughter millions for that goal. The police live up to their motto, “To Protect and To Serve”, but they are primarily protecting and serving an oppressive social structure, defending property and its owners against attacks by the deprived. The courts are run by judges who are for the most part members of the elite. They are the final arbiters of punishment, locking up anyone who threatens the system, primarily poor minorities. They have created an American gulag, an egregious, ever-growing prison-industrial complex that crushes those who dare defy its rules.

We need to show the soldiers and police they are workers too. We all have the same basic interests and the same common enemy: their employer. If we win enough of them to our side, they will stand with us rather than against us when a revolutionary situation develops. Winning the judges to our side is unlikely. Most of them are ruling class. We’ll probably just have to find some socially useful work for them, like sweeping the sidewalks.

Our rulers (yes, we really do have rulers) try to convince us that there’s no solution to humanity’s problems, no alternative to the way things are now. This is human nature. Get used to it.

Fortunately the international working class is refusing to get used to it. It is resisting this new wave of impoverishment the corporations and their governments are trying to force onto it. Our bound Gulliver is starting to awaken. It knows now it is fettered and is testing its strength against these bonds. In some places it has already broken a few. The rule of the Lilliputians is coming to an end. This won’t happen quickly, though. A long struggle lies ahead of us. But the tide has changed and is now running in our favor.

The uprising began in the Muslim world because they are under the most direct imperialist attack. It has spread to the NATO countries, the chief instigators of the attacks, because their populations are having to pay the bills for this war through social cutbacks and lower wages. As the uprising spreads globally, the elite will do everything they can to crush it. They will try to divide us and make us fight one another. They will offer tempting reforms and compromises that will allow them to maintain ownership. They will bribe some of our opportunistic leaders with promises of token power if they cooperate. They will jail us. They will even kill some of us. But if we persist, holding to a militant rather than a reformist course, we will eventually free ourselves of them and build a system that emphasizes the humane in humanity. This is our time, an historic battle for liberation.

The author of The Last Days of the Lilliputians describes himself as follows:

William T. Hathaway is an adjunct professor of American studies at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. His latest book, Radical Peace: People Refusing War, presents the experiences of peace activists who have moved beyond petitions and demonstrations into direct action, defying the government’s laws and impeding its ability to kill. Chapters are posted on a page of the publisher’s website at http://media.trineday.com/radicalpeace. He is also the author of Summer Snow, the story of an American warrior in Central Asia who falls in love with a Sufi Muslim and learns from her an alternative to the military mentality. Chapters are available at www.peacewriter.org.

Correspondence:

Millionaires of the World Unite! The tides are turning!

By Christopher Helali

The present state of affairs can be summed up as follows: the rich are enjoying the spoils of their vast economic war transpiring across the world at the expense of the working class. This may seem all too obvious to most of us, but what the hell is going on to fix it? Our politicians are inept and the political will is in a state of apathetic hibernation. We have forgotten that feeling of what it means to consistently fail in a system rigged in favor of the elite? Where has that spirit gone to fight back? Has everyone here capitulated the struggle to end global capitalism? With a new year before us, we have some tough questions to ask ourselves, each other and all leftist anti-capitalist movements.

The “secluded life” of elites today, what Harvard professor Michael Sandel calls “skyboxification,” indicates the destruction of the commons, the tearing of the social fabric that once allowed all classes of the population to interact. Yet, with all of this economic perversity before us is it not the case that there is a strange feeling of disavowal, as if the American Dream is still a possibility for all of us to achieve? This illusion, promised to all, is the cornerstone of the American experience. It is ridiculous to believe that there ever was a dream to begin with, noting that the illusion was created as a means of control, by who other than old, rich, white men. Yes, those that support the dream will say “oh
that a segment of the Egyptian population has taken on the role of a vanguard. What is clearly discernible is the fact that a revolutionary consciousness has set in among the thousands of protesters in the streets of Egypt who are willing to sacrifice everything. This new vanguard, comprised of secular and liberal segments of the population is focused on balancing the increasing power of the new “pharaoh,” and thereby continuing the transition to a people’s democracy. The public outcry over the ongoing power struggle between the executive and the judiciary is indicative of the political consciousness and revolutionary drive of the people. Apathy, the greatest counterrevolutionary force, has not set in amongst a portion of the population set on continuing the revolution to the end. While in the end, the Muslim Brotherhood and President Morsi have regained control and won the constitutional referendum, we cannot dismiss the outcry against these measures as in any way a failure. Quite on the contrary they indicate the breaks within the superstructure, the areas that we must focus our entire revolutionary will.

While our situation in the year to come seems daunting, we must continue to put all of our efforts into the struggle. We must not give an inch to capitulation or apathy. Any revisionism that is antithetical to the goals of the working class must be dismissed as opportunism by the ruling elite, the most notorious provocateurs, who seek to co-opt our movement within the broad ideological foundation of the capitalist system. Once again we must realize that the system itself, capitalism embodied, is the structure that perpetuates inequality, war, perpetual conflict and crisis. The idea that we can give capitalism a “human face” and turn it into a better, more equitable system, is contrary to the basic nature of truly existing capitalism itself. Ask the capitalist theorists themselves who fully acknowledge the natural inequality within the system and project this pseudo-evolutionary vision of positive ethical egoism. We must be opposed to all compromise to change capitalism into something more equal and focus on the move to a transition to socialism. The urgent necessity for a broad, national and international labor movement is existentially critical for the trade unions still struggling against the plutocrats.

We must be ruthlessly critical, steeped in theory and focused on praxis to further enhance the revolutionary movement, thus moving the course of history towards the zero point and the liberating potential that awaits us.

Christopher Helali is a member of the armed forces who describes himself as “an Adjunct Professor of History at Mass-Bay Community College and a Graduate Student studying political theory, theology and philosophy here in Boston”.

but they were good philanthropists” or “look he grew up poor.” Sorry, but one out of hundreds of millions does not make it a universal, in fact, the system is bought for and controlled by the plutocrats.

The quandary posed here is nothing new. In fact, it was the same thing that plagued the International as well as all Leftist parties since their respective inceptions. To rephrase Lenin’s classic dictum, “What is to be done?”…what are we to do? We are confronted with two obvious facts. The social-democratic movement, advocated by Bernstein, which is the model for much of the European continent, this pseudo-socialist “welfare-state,” is in collapse. The welfare-state is attacked on all fronts by the emergence of financial capitalism, something Lenin indicated as a hallmark of the imperialist nature of the “financial oligarchy.” Likewise, the revolutionary strategy and subsequent dictatorship of the proletariat, as advocated by Lenin, collapsed under the revisionism of Stalinism and “socialism in one country.” Concordantly, the final bastions and outposts of State Socialism are suffering tremendous stress from the globalization and imperial nature of capital. With two choices and two indications of failure, we can extrapolate a key truth, the absolute power of the capitalist system. Here I will give a classic quote from Mao Zedong’s work On Practice which states: “If a man wants to succeed in his work, that is, to achieve the anticipated results, he must bring his ideas into correspondence with the laws of the objective external world; if they do not correspond, he will fail in his practice. After he fails, he draws his lessons, corrects his ideas to make them correspond to the laws of the external world, and can thus turn failure into success; this is what is meant by ‘failure is the mother of success’ and ‘a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.’”

Is this not what our objective is today? Listen, the old models need to be updated and reformulated for the current system and our duty is to ensure we remain true to the revolutionary potential embodied within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, the radically transformative vision of a future beyond commoditization, alienation and the domination of the market.

With capitalism rearing its ugly head more so now than ever before, we must be prepared with our swords and sicks to cut its head swiftly and decisively. However, like the mythical Hydra of Ancient Greece, we must be fully prepared to face a counterattack from the forces of capital that will unequivocally re-double in both strength and force. The past years have taught us the power of the politico-ideological system that is centered in the West. What have the “signs from the future,” these events of the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street indicated? They have shown that portions of the population below the surface of the ideological superstructure are struggling against it in all facets of their lives.

Take for example Egypt. These past months have indicated
Correspondence:

A Laissez Fairy Tale

By Timothy Bearly

Prologue

It was the during the early 21st century when the political tension between the far left and the far right reached it’s breaking point. Hyper-partisan squabbling and perennial gridlock between the two diametrically opposed parties was resulting in a United States Congress that was as sterile as a mule. The nation was in desperate need of a change, in desperate need of an In-vitro-injection. Because with the polarized country pitted against itself in a perpetual game of tug o’ war--the delicate strands of rope that precariously bound the nation together--were about to snap.

One of the hot topics of the day was the pervasive issue of individual liberty. Many people felt that the government was becoming too intrusive, too involved in their personal lives. Poverty was rampant, and with an increasing percentage of the unemployed focusing their anger on Capitol Hill, the plutocrats were hoping to tap into the frustration. Not wanting to be regulated, the would-be robber barons endeavored to convince the members of the middle class that the solution to these problems was to decentralize and ultimately dismantle the government.

This is the story of the subsequent events that were about to transpire.

* * *

“Don’t give me that statist bullshit!” Joe howled at his coworkers.

“If you believe in Keynesian economics, then I have some land in Chernobyl that I’d like to sell you.”

Workplace arguments concerning politics were a regular occurrence at the Rutherford Chemical Company. Everyone had their own opinion about what needed to happen in Washington, more of this, less of that, you name it. But the volatile atmosphere always subsided when the president of the company, Willard M. Rutherford, was on the factory floor--in which case everyone pretended to be a right wing, gun toting, bible thumping, proponent of deregulation and Trickle-down economics. Not Joe though, he didn’t have to pretend. He was a bona fide true believer.

Indeed, Joe had Ayn Rand Kool-Aid and the blood of an irate elephant pumping through his congested veins. Of course, he would allege that the ones “drinking the Kool-Aid” were the commies on the left. But that’s the ironic thing about those who have an affinity for the triple-bonded, powdered concoction: Kool-Aid comes in many different flavors, some people prefer the red, some people prefer the blue...and some people--with a 32 oz. cup of The Jim Jones Special in hand--hypocratically assert, “the opposition is drinking the Kool-Aid!”

Oh yeah! Its always the other guy who’s the cult member. Its always the other guy who’s being brainwashed by some silver-tongued, pied piper. Not us...never us.

Joe had worked at the factory for much of his adult life, 12 years in fact. Now, at 36 years old, he wondered like so many others, “where had all of the time gone?” A man who always lived beneath his means, he was hoping that by now he would’ve had some money socked away so that his kids could go to college. Unfortunately, after the economic meltdown a few years earlier, he and his wife lost most of the money that they had invested. Albeit they took a substantial hit during the financial crisis, they were still doing ok. Neither wealthy nor destitute. Joe and his wife owned a modest 3 bedroom home where they lived with their two children, a son named Matthew and a daughter named Mary. A seemingly perfect family, complete with a suburban home (far away from the ghetto), a luxurious station wagon (with a “Don’t tread on me” sticker on the bumper), and adorable children (with biblical names). Yeah, it was the quintessential life...the life of a proverbial average Joe.

* * *

Notwithstanding his cookie-cutter middle-class life, Joe was not a happy man. He was deeply concerned about the people who were conspiring to lead the nation down the path to China. He had a disconcerting and vehement conviction that the influence of the founding fathers was being overshadowed by the influence of Karl Marx. He believed, thanks to the literature given to him by his boss, Mr. Rutherford, that communism was a cancer that needed to be rooted out. In the latest book given to him, “Working like crazy, to support the lazy,” Joe read about “The leninist scourge” and “The government neoplasm,” which has metastasized to such a degree that the whole system must be extirpated. According to the books author, “unmitigated deregulation is the chemotherapy we must ingest if we wish to treat this otherwise terminal condition.”

You’ve heard all the rhetoric before:

“The insidious bureaucratic tentacles of the regulatory octopoid are strangling productivity and smothering economic growth.”

The author reaches even deeper into his treasure trove of old chestnuts:

“The progressive tax system is enabling the indolent parasites to freeload and essentially steal the fruits of labor from the hard working and productive members of society.”

These are some of the reasons, Joe believed, that we needed to be worried about the future of our children and grandchildren.

“We need to get the government out of the way,” he contended.

“This company cannot afford any more taxes and regulations!”

Well...at least that’s what Mr. Rutherford wanted his employees, like Joe, to believe. It was a deceptive method of convincing them to act against their own interests.

To Mr. Rutherford it was simple, the smaller the government was, the more leverage he and the Rutherford Chemical Company had. Without government he wouldn’t have to worry about those pesky health and safety regulations--which ultimately


diminish profit.

The anti-government rhetoric was merely a pretext, the moral imperative of “individual liberty” was an elaborate ruse. Mr. Rutherford wasn’t really opposed to authoritarianism, he merely wanted to be the one wielding the bludgeon. But could he reveal this to his to his employees? Of course not. It was necessary that he maintained the illusion that he actually valued their lives. It was important that he convince them that the government was the enemy—lest they focus their animosity on people like him...and the members of the modern landed-gentry.

But unbeknownst to the faithful stalwarts like Joe, government was actually the reason that the Rutherford Chemical Company was required to supply respirators to their employees when they worked with hazardous chemicals—such as sulfuric and hydrochloric acid. Government was the reason workers were paid overtime. Government was the reason Joe was allowed to take paid paternity leave. Joe didn’t spend too much time thinking about these legislative benefits though, and that’s why he was Mr. Rutherford’s favorite lap dog; they tend to favor the ones who don’t think too much. Thinking, after all, is detrimental to believing what you’re told and falling in line.

Mr. Rutherford was not only a shrewd businessman, he was a cunning propagandist. His ability to convince others to do and say things—things that they wouldn’t otherwise do or say—was a talent he possessed that would’ve made the likes of Joseph Goebbels cringe with envy. Just like the politicians he seemingly despised, Mr. Rutherford understood that it was much easier to control his subjects by appealing to their baser instincts.

Hanging on the wall in break room of the Rutherford Chemical Company was the famous “Lunch atop a Skyscraper” photo. The caption beneath it read:

“We are working men, We are men of virtue!”

The obsequious ones, like Joe—who was conditioned for obedience after 4 years in the military—were easily persuaded to unyieldingly drudge in collective harmony for the betterment of the company. Although Mr. Rutherford contended that collectivism was an enemy of “rugged individualism” and resulted in the “subjugation of the individual to a group,” he promoted steadfast Interdependence in the workplace—a patent contradiction few seemed to notice.

Fortunately, for Mr. Rutherford and Joe, the zeitgeist was beginning to shift. The immense gravity of the new zeitgeist was forcing capricious pendulum of public opinion to sway to the far right. People were sick to death of the intrusive nanny state. They were at their wits end with the central government telling them how to live their lives. “Big government” was finally about to become passé. Statism was becoming a thing of the past.

*

The bloodless revolution began with jarring austerity measures—cuts to just about every government institution except the military. The idea that government spending was out of control had gained so much momentum that the newly elected members of the house and senate were able to pass the “John Galt act” and the “no more freeloaders act,” which essentially gutted Medicare and Medicaid. Unlike previous legislation, which usually had Orwellian titles—such as the “patriot act” or “right to work,” the new members of congress were no longer bothering with pretenses, they didn’t have to, they had the support of the majority.

The safety net, minimum wage laws, and OSHA regulations, which ostensibly impede job growth, were next to go.

“The teat sucking welfare queens are finally going to have to learn to be self reliant.” Joe contemptuously told to his coworkers.

“God forbid they actually have to work for a living!”

*

Mr. Rutherford, per usual for a man of means, didn’t like to be referred to as rich, he much rather preferred the euphemistic alternative, “job creator.” Just as it was necessary that he fool others into believing he was a self-made man (although he inherited the company from his father), it was also incumbent on him to paint a picture of himself as a magnanimous man-of-the-people—who’s chief concern was not the bottom line, but creating jobs for the citizens of the community. “If my taxes weren’t so high I would be able hire more workers,” he would reiterate, cunningly omitting that he wasn’t creating any jobs with the millions he had socked away.

Now, with no more burdensome taxes and regulations to worry about, Mr. Rutherford would ostensibly be in a position to create more good paying jobs, or so it would seem. But, no longer bridled with minimum wage laws, the first thing the Rutherford Chemical Company did was cut employee pay. Workers who were once paid $7.25 an hour were now paid a quarter of their previous wage for doing the same job.

“It is necessary, if we want to compete abroad, that we cut employee pay.”

Herein lies the catch 22: jobs were being outsourced to China. The solution: make the conditions for our workers the same as they are for workers in China. There is no need to have a product manufactured oversees if you can pay someone in this country 30 cents an hour to manufacture it. And if the health and safety regulations are resulting in jobs being sent to China, then just eliminate the health and safety regulations! It was quite simple really. And with the safety net gutted, there would be millions of desperate applicants who had no choice but to work for mere pittance.

As it turns out, jobs were actually being created, and at a rapid rate. All of that “job creator” talk wasn’t bullsht. Deregulation was in fact the cure to unemployment. Unbridling the free market, and allowing businessmen and entrepreneurs to copulate—without being forced to take regulatory contraceptives—was the key to the propagation of jobs. But one fundamentally important question remained unasked: what kind of jobs was this fledgling Anarcho-capitalist creature actually giving birth to?

But there was some good news. The triumph of the libertarians meant that now the government was no longer “protecting people from themselves.” Now, if people wanted to dope themselves up, pay money for sex, or ride a bike without a helmet, then they were free to do so. Finally the people were free! finally the people had true liberty—or so they thought. Unfortunately, the liberties gained appeared to be proportionally offset by the liberties lost, and as the workers began to notice their rights slowly being consumed by the unchained free market beast, some began to raise questions.
“Government sector, private sector, we’re merely trading one tyranny for another!”

Joe scoffed at such tripe. He was no statist, he didn’t want to be a slave to government, he wanted to be self reliant!

“If you don’t like it here then move to China,” he parroted.

* *

Years passed. Land and wealth became more narrowly concentrated. Federal and state boundaries began to break down and private boundaries were being outlined, boundaries with which the plutocrats—who now owned vast tracks of land—essentially had absolute control over the people who worked and/or resided on their property.

No more government intrusion. Consequently, no more government protection. Now the primary function of government was, in the words of James Madison, “to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”

With record profits at the Rutherford Chemical Company—due in part to the decrease in pay and job safety—Mr. Rutherford was now able to purchase a quarter of the state of Idaho, basically the entire panhandle. Subsequently, the people who worked at the Rutherford Chemical Company now rented their homes from Mr. Rutherford as well. Payment was conveniently deducted from their paychecks, it was sort of like wage garnishment.

The beauty of this new system was the outward appearance of “Voluntaryism.” So, maybe the proletarians didn’t have the opportunity that the aristocrats had, perhaps the impoverished had no choice but to sign a contract. But it wasn’t like anyone was holding a gun to their head.

By engineering and fostering an artifice of free will, the new oligarchs were able to effectively keep their subjects oblivious to their own plight.

Eventually, what was once known as the united states, became known as the United Federation of CEO’s. And instead of the nation being divided into 50 states, there were now 88 corporately owned and operated territories, which ranged in size from one million to one hundred million acres. Now, with government out of the way, the laws depended on the whims of these neo-feudal lords.

In the case of Mr. Rutherford, he had his employees held in hock with high rent and low pay, insuring he had more control over them.

But ol’ Joe, he was as happy as a clam... as long as he wasn’t living in Red China.

Unfortunately, when Joe placed the hackneyed, “Don’t tread on me,” decal on the rear bumper of his station wagon, he had erroneously concluded that government was the only manifestation of tyranny.

Epilogue

Fortunately, with the abolition of the central and local government, there were no more freedom-inhibiting taxes to pay. Albeit, there were now “tolls” that were paid for using privately owned infrastructure, and “fees” that were paid to the landlords—who were also the employers, legislators and enforcers.

But was this taxation without representation? Of course not--how could it be? The people weren’t even being taxed.

Was it subjugation? Of course not...how could there be subjugation without government?

This was freedom, Herbert Spencer style—unmitigated, laissez-faire...freedom!

Joe didn’t want to live in communist China. Moreover, he was worried about his children and grandchildren living in a country where exploited factory workers toiled 14 hours a day in a sweatshop. Thank God for the Western world!

Joe succumbed to emphysema a few years later—a condition certainly brought on by decades of working with toxic chemicals. Sadly, he wasn’t able to see his children and grandchildren come of age in the new Reaganomic wonderland, he wasn’t able to teach them about the virtues of the unbridled free market. But, no matter, his family was able to witness, firsthand, the splendor of a governmentless world.

Yeah, maybe there wasn’t any class mobility in this modern—Gilded—age, maybe it was impossible to buy a home or save for one’s future. Maybe this was feudalism with a new name. But Joe’s indoctrinated family felt fortunate to be living in a “free” country—a country where Joe’s son, Matthew, could sell his organs to rich people...and his daughter, Mary, could prostitute herself (to Mr. Rutherford) without worrying about the intrusive nanny state getting in the way.

Despotism, just like Kool-aid, can be manufactured in many different flavors. Sometimes, when a particular brand becomes too sour for the citizenry, it becomes necessary to engineer a new concoction, to create something sweeter for the palate, something with a more delightful smell and a less transparent shade. Ultimately, the goal of all despots is to deceive their--cyanide-drinking--counterparts into yearning for that which is ultimately toxic to them.

I wonder if Joe would be proud of the dystopian blend he helped brew up.
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