

# Cuba, the invincible revolution

written by Melinda Butterfield

July 28, 2021



*The following article by Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th century, was originally published on Sept. 30, 1993, during an earlier imperialist offensive against socialist Cuba.*

Of the great revolutions of the 20th century, including those of the USSR and China, the Cuban Revolution has been subjected to the most onerous siege of all.

It is true that in the early days after the victory of the October Revolution, the Soviet Union was encircled and invaded in a siege unparalleled in all previous modern

history. But soon it did have the great advantage that there were revolutionary developments — indeed unprecedented proletarian struggles — in Germany, Hungary, France and all over Europe, including a general strike in Britain.

All this helped lift, at least in part, the siege imposed by the imperialists.

Soon after the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949, when the Chiang Kai-shek clique was finally routed and had to take refuge in Taiwan, the Sino-Soviet agreement was concluded. This historic treaty between the two great socialist countries put the imperialists on notice that China would be defended in case of aggression by the U.S.

Of course, none of this stopped the imperialists from provoking a struggle on the Korean peninsula and beginning a siege of Korea that has lasted to this very day.

Cuba, however, has had none of the great advantages enjoyed by the USSR, China or the DPRK — each of which has had socialist allies on its borders.

Indeed, only 90 miles away from Cuba is the colossus of U.S. finance capital and its vast military establishment. It takes an enormous amount of fortitude, unmatched determination, sheer grit and perseverance to hold on and move forward with the revolution, as has been done in Cuba.

All this describes the qualities of the popular and heroic leader of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro.

### **Eisenhower, Nixon and Kennedy**

In March 1960, just a little over a year after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, President Dwight Eisenhower secretly approved a CIA plan to invade the island. The idea was to use U.S.-trained Cuban mercenaries as a cover for Yankee aggression.

The Cuban revolutionary leaders soon knew of the plan. They publicly warned the people that an invasion was coming.

That was in a presidential election year. Eisenhower's vice president, Richard Nixon, was running against John F. Kennedy. You would think there would have been public debate in the U.S. on the advisability of an intervention in Cuba. Wouldn't a so-called free press itself be a participant in molding public opinion on this dangerous military initiative from the Pentagon?

But the historical record shows that the debate in the U.S. media at that time was not about Cuba at all. It focused almost completely on China — whether the U.S. should intervene to prevent the People's Republic from recovering two little offshore islands, Quemoy and Matsu.

It was altogether a false issue. Both the outgoing Eisenhower-Nixon administration and the incoming Kennedy administration deliberately conjured it up in order to divert public opinion from what they were planning for Cuba.

Nixon and Kennedy were vying for advantage in the eyes of bourgeois public opinion, trying to out-hawk each other in condemning Cuba. At the same time they cooperated in remaining silent about the actual planning for the invasion. Such is the nature of Republican-Democratic bipartisan politics.

The invasion of April 1961 ended, as the whole world knows, in a humiliating defeat at the Bay of Pigs for the CIA and its lackeys.

The Bay of Pigs disaster was not merely the result of a military miscalculation, although that may have happened, too. The imperialists' political miscalculation was far greater.

The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations failed to understand that what they faced in Cuba was not just another political change. They had experienced many

political changes in the history of Latin America. But none had been a true social revolution.

This was what was new about the Cuban Revolution. It was not just a change of the superstructure but of the class structure itself. It was a revolution against the landlords, capitalists and foreign owners of the vast wealth of Cuba.

### **New form, same old content**

How much have U.S. imperialism's plans for Cuba changed since the debacle at the Bay of Pigs? They differ widely in form — but not in content. The effort to overcome and destroy one of the most profound social revolutions in history goes on unabated.

Today's method is not to use naked, open predatory force. It is to carry out a disguised yet equally deadly economic strangulation.

Both in spirit and substance, the Clinton administration is continuing the policy the earlier Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations pursued.

Instead of a blatant, predatory military attack, the imperialists are pursuing the same goals through the use of the vast economic power of the U.S. in order to strangle Cuba economically.

A nation proves its true worth when it can fall back on its own inner resources in the face of overwhelming odds. Cuba has done that splendidly for so long. But the siege of Cuba has lasted much too long, even if it were a larger nation with many more millions of people in it.

All this underlines the very urgent need for international support. This international support can and must come above all from the United States. This is of the greatest urgency: a reawakening of the U.S. working class to its responsibilities in the face of the monstrous character of this attempt to strangle the Cuban Revolution.

One must hope for and continue to work ceaselessly and relentlessly to awaken the tremendous potential inherent in the U.S. working class to carry out its international responsibilities to the besieged Cuban Revolution.

There can be no greater act of international class solidarity than to energetically defend the Cuban Revolution against blatant, predatory U.S. imperialism.



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## Fascist violence and the form of the state

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*Below is an excerpt from an article by Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th century. It was written shortly after Ronald Reagan's inauguration in 1981 — that is, at the beginning of the long period of reaction that is peaking today.*

*Marcy argues for the importance of Marxist clarity on the difference between violence by the bourgeois-democratic state, however brutal, and that of fascist*

*organizations, "particularly when they are armed and supported materially by right-wing, disaffected, but powerful elements of the ruling capitalist establishment, constitute a threatening parallel form to the legal (bourgeois-democratic) capitalist state."*

What is completely left out of consideration is that the spread of fascist organizations takes place in a vastly different, if not wholly new, social, political, and economic situation. The entire social environment in which the spread of this evil disease takes place imparts to it a significance which far surpasses the numerical strength of these organizations.

It is this which adds a really new dimension to the perilous growth of this virulent disease. Fascist violence has been endemic to the maintenance of the domination of the ruling class in the U.S. for a number of decades. It is, however, exceptionally important to distinguish between the violence which emanates directly and openly from the capitalist state, and the extra-legal, extra-governmental violence of fascist organizations.

The capitalist state is itself, of course, the main generator of force and violence. In its role as an instrument of capitalist domination over the working class and the oppressed, it operates as an organ of suppression in order to maintain and secure its rule over the masses.

### **Differentiate between government and extra-legal violence**

Violence practiced upon the working class and the oppressed is therefore a concomitant element of the rule of the oppressing and exploiting bourgeoisie. Notwithstanding the viciousness, ferociousness or magnitude of the violence which the ruling class visits upon the oppressed, it must nevertheless be considered as violence within the framework of the bourgeois legal ("democratic") system.

Such violence must be differentiated from, and not be confused with, the extra-legal, extra-governmental violence which is the essential characteristic of fascist organizations of the type under discussion. It is, of course, absolutely true that both legal and extra-legal violence have coexisted along with the bourgeois state since the very inception of the state itself.

In the U.S., legal and extra-legal violence have existed side-by-side for longer than a century. Ku Klux Klan violence is a principal example of how extra-legal violence visited upon the oppressed masses coexists with the legal forms of the capitalist state, and how one promotes the other.

Anti-labor violence employed on a huge scale for many decades by individual employers and industries has been of an extra-legal character. Most particularly noteworthy are strike-breaking organizations and the employment of underworld mobsters. "Right-to-work," open-shop states are frequently the very same states which have either clandestinely or openly supported the Klan.

The pogroms visited upon oppressed nationalities in Czarist Russia are another example of how extra-legal forms of violence are carried out alongside with and encouraged and promoted by the legally constituted government. Pogrom violence in old Russia didn't differ much from the massacres carried out by the Night Riders in the U.S.

Every capitalist state tolerates and occasionally promotes this sort of extra-legal violence. The difference, however, between fascist violence and other forms of illegal violence practiced by the government should be made clear.

For example, police brutality is frequently as vicious and as violent as that carried out by the fascists, and on occasion goes beyond legal limits (usually characterized by the bourgeois press as "excessive"). The two should not be confused even though the police may, and often do, collaborate with the Klan, neo-Nazis and other fascist

and neo-fascist organizations.

### **Fascist groups threaten bourgeois-democratic state**

Fascist organizations in their embryonic form, particularly when they are armed and supported materially by right-wing, disaffected, but powerful elements of the ruling capitalist establishment, constitute a threatening parallel form to the legal (bourgeois-democratic) capitalist state.

While receiving encouragement and sustenance from the capitalist state, embryonic fascist forms at the same time rival and stand in antagonism to the bourgeois democratic state. If historical conditions favor them, they have the propensity and organic tendency to overpower the bourgeois-democratic form of the capitalist state.

Such a situation can only exist in periods of extraordinarily acute social crisis when the capitalist state is so torn by accumulating inner contradictions and weakened by its inability to overcome its social crisis that it inevitably gives way to extra-parliamentary, extra-legal forms of rule.



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# **Murder of Fred Hampton was domestic version of My Lai massacre**

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*Struggle-La Lucha is republishing this article about the global ramifications of the U.S. government's execution of Chicago Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark on Dec. 4, 1969. It was written some 50 years ago by Marxist thinker and fighter Sam Marcy and originally appeared on Dec. 23, 1969.*

It would be woefully wrong and extremely one-sided to regard the murder of Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark as just another in the series of cruel and barbarous atrocities against Black people.

It is all that, to be sure, and more. The event, however, marks a certain turning point and discloses an objective orientation by the ruling class which must be taken by us as a point of departure for a more concrete, more accurate appraisal of the entire

situation in the United States.

For one thing, it indicates that the ruling class has definitely abandoned, if it ever really entertained, the idea that a series of what it called “basic reforms,” carried out over a period of time, would solve the fundamental problem of racist oppression and super-exploitation of Black people.

These measures, even in minimal form, have never really gotten off the ground. And what has been granted in the way of concessions came in the wake of more than two hundred mass rebellions, and has been of such a meagre character that it has served only to enrage the mass of the impoverished population and to harden its determination for sustained struggle.

### **Policy of naked violence**

The series of coordinated attacks by the Nixon administration on the Black Panther Party in Chicago, Los Angeles, Connecticut and New York takes the Johnson policy a long, long step further into the blind alley from which the master class will never again emerge.

It shows that in spite of the fabulous, utterly incalculable wealth that the ruling class has accumulated, especially in the last few decades, it is less willing and less capable of carrying out the basic, elementary democratic reforms fully a hundred years after a protracted, bloody Civil War, in which these very issues were presumed to have been settled once and for all.

Instead, the master class has embarked on a policy of open, naked violence as the “final and ultimate solution.”

The Nixon administration hopes to “ride out” the storm of protest that the murders have evoked. It counts on the liberal bourgeois politicians to say their piece, to stage phony independent investigations like that headed by Goldberg, Clark and others, to

pass harmless resolutions, present petitions, and engage in condemnatory orations against “excessive and unnecessary force” by the police - while at the same time more Panthers are jailed and more brutal assaults continue.

But this time-honored approach of the possessing classes to the social problems they themselves created by their oppression and robbery of the poor and exploited has dubious value for them in the world of today. The use of mass repression by exploiting classes is not a new phenomenon; it has been characteristic of the domination of the ruling classes since the dawn of class society.

It has had, however, lasting significance only when the foundations of its social system were still relatively stable and firm. It is precisely this which is much in question today. The truth of the matter is that the U.S. is now engulfed in an unparalleled social crisis. The crisis is of such proportions that there are scarcely any leading political representatives of the bourgeoisie who by their utterances do not show awareness of the acute character of the crisis.

For this crisis is unlike any that the U.S. has experienced. It is superficial and misleading to say that the crisis is caused by the Vietnam War, and that if this war were ended, the money expended on it would be used to improve the lot of Black people, other oppressed people and the working class generally.

### **Symptom of disease**

The Vietnam War is merely a giant symptom of a malignancy which is ravaging the entire social fabric of the capitalist system. The crisis that the U.S. is passing through is a crisis of the whole system, not merely a cyclical economic crisis as in the past. Nor is it a crisis which is exclusively geared to the effects of the Vietnam War.

Of course U.S. capitalism has experienced many grave and acute economic crises

which in their time were soon accompanied by serious political struggles and which later were overcome by the bourgeoisie as a new cycle of capitalist development emerged.

But all of these crises were more or less resolved, especially those following the turn of the century, by outward expansion into the world markets and by subjugating Asian people (as in the Philippines), Latin Americans (as in Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc.) and African people (as in Liberia).

The great economic crisis and subsequent stagnation of the early 1930s was resolved by U.S. intervention in the Second World War and by its subsequent economic and political subjugation of practically the entire world, with the exception of the countries where the bourgeoisie had been overthrown.

### **The deadly contradiction**

The crisis in which the U.S. finds itself today is one where the area subject to its economic exploitation and political oppression is rapidly contracting precisely at a time when the productive forces at the disposal of the U.S. ruling class continue to expand at a staggering rate.

(The technological advances in electronics, aeronautics and space technology generally are only some of the well-known and outstanding examples. But perhaps of equal importance are the still secret advances in the research and development laboratories of the giant monopolies such as AT&T, Du Pont, GE and others - aside from those that are directly controlled by the research and development laboratories of the Pentagon, which are the collective technological storehouse of the bourgeoisie.)

This contradiction, namely the contradiction between the monstrous expansion of the productive forces and the ever sharper curtailment of markets and areas under

political and military control of the U.S., is the most acute expression today of the general crisis engulfing U.S. imperialism. It expresses itself on the world arena politically as the struggle between U.S. imperialism and the liberation movements of the world and their supporters.

The Vietnam War constitutes an effort to resolve this contradiction in its favor by military means. What the U.S. does in the Middle East and in Latin America, as well as other areas, is the same thing, but accomplished by slightly different means.

### **War's end won't change it**

Soon the U.S. will have a gross national product worth a trillion dollars. Ending the war in Vietnam and transferring some of the money for concessions to Black people and working people generally would make only the smallest dent in this astronomical sum of money. Yet this is not at all likely to happen.

The avariciousness of the bourgeoisie when it comes to allocating any sum of money was illustrated just a short time ago by the most venomous opposition to a relatively piddling sum of \$70 million for such an imperious necessity as rat control in slum areas.

There is no reason whatever to expect the bourgeoisie to have a change of heart if they end the Vietnam War. For in their calculation, the ending of one war creates an imperialist peace which is merely a preparatory period for another imperialist war.

The bitter war that the U.S. is waging at home is only one aspect of a war that it is fighting on a world front against all the liberation movements. To prosecute this war as ruthlessly as it can, it must also, in its wake, carry on a desperate undercover war of economic aggression, even against its closest imperialist allies, and sometimes on issues which, measured on the scale of world events, appear petty and avaricious in the extreme.

This best can be gauged by an example from the way the Nixon administration handled a decision that the U.S. should go ahead and build the SST (Super Sonic Transport). In the face of the well-known objections of their imperialist allies, France and Britain, the United States decided to go ahead and build the SST because, Nixon said, "We must retain world leadership in aviation."

### **Competition and decay**

The significance as well as the arrogance involved in this decision by Nixon illustrates perfectly the sharpening contradiction between the need of U.S. monopoly capitalism to expand and at the same time the danger which it entails for it.

France and Britain are two of the oldest and most important allies the U.S. has. They are in fact blood brothers from the same monopoly capitalist family. It is true that both France and Britain have been reduced to somewhat of a semi-colonial status by the U.S., but they are still imperialist brigands themselves.

In view of the heavy reliance that the U.S. places upon them in the event of any major military adventure the U.S. undertakes, logic would seem to dictate that the U.S. should make a minor economic concession to them in this instance even if it were only for the purpose of strengthening them as imperialist allies.

But, said Nixon, the U.S. "must"—and we repeat, "must"—retain world leadership, even in a minor case like this. And there is not an aircraft company in the United States that would say otherwise.

### **Hue and cry of liberals**

A sanctimonious hue and cry went up from many newspapers in this country berating Nixon for making the SST decision – especially from the New York Times. But would any one of those newspapers, each of which is an imperialist

establishment in competition with others, cede leadership in its own industry to a competitor? Would the New York Times cede leadership in circulation or advertising to a competitor? On the contrary, it fights tooth and nail, and as avariciously as any aircraft company, to expand and retain its own leadership against any and all competitors.

Such are the laws of imperialist competition. The growth of huge monopolistic dynasties, and the latest form that they take, such as conglomerates, has not softened the nature of the competitive struggle, but has made it more violent in character and subjected it to catastrophic solutions beyond the control of the capitalist government itself.

Sanctimonious editorials and preachments on the need for “reasonable concessions” in foreign policy carry about as much weight with the Pentagon as the same moral preachments and exhortations for “reasonable” concessions to Black people carry with Strom Thurmond and the entire racist establishment.

The foreign policy of an imperialist government is no more than an extension of its domestic policy. The murder of Hampton and Clark is a domestic version of the My Lai massacre.

## **Repression and strikes**

The general intensification of the class struggle at home as evidenced by the attack against the General Electric workers by the GE oligarchy is bound to be repeated on a wider and more massive scale.

Boulwarism, the GE version of modern, space age strikebreaking, is merely a precursor of the tactic that the ruling class will apply on a more general and widespread scale as the crisis of the ruling class deepens. Boulwarism concretely takes its name from the GE union-busting representative who has consistently

pushed to establish a “new era” in “labor relations.” His particular assault consists of submitting as GE’s new “contract offer” to the union a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum, and arrogantly stating that whether the workers like it or not, GE will negotiate no further.

The sheer gall of this pronouncement at contract expiration date, let alone the criminal indifference displayed to the many valid and unresolved grievances of the workers, is an obviously well-calculated provocation – a deliberate attempt to smash the unions and demoralize the workers.

### **It's all one policy**

The Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon policy is merely an application of Boulwarism in U.S. foreign relations. It is a policy of the use of military force where threats and ultimatums have failed to intimidate the oppressed.

The action of the steel barons in shooting down the striking steel workers in the 1930s was not an accidental, episodic event torn out of the context of the historical development of heavy industry and high finance. Not more so than My Lai, Chicago, Los Angeles, Connecticut and New York.

By taking the broader historical view of the evolution of U.S. finance capital, we can see that the architects who fashioned the My Lai massacre, the Chicago murders, the GE attack on the workers, have threads that reach down to the roots of the very nature of the capitalist system of exploitation.

The steel barons of today, even more so than those of the 1930s, are inextricably tied in with the dynastic rulers of the auto, electric and space industries, all of whom have staked their destiny on world domination or “leadership” as they like to call it. Not one of these industrial-financial combines, whether it be based on the oldest or the newest modern technology, evinces any but the most aggressive, most vicious

drive to control and dominate all the economic arteries of the globe.

And in truth, the bourgeoisie has little choice in the matter. Given their insatiable lust for super-profits and driven by the inexorable law of capitalist accumulation, the productive forces at the disposal of the capitalist class become ever larger, spanning continents and oceans, underwater and in outer space. They can least of all be confined or reduced or driven back to their national borders.

### **Force: theirs and ours**

Force, which the bourgeoisie used so frequently and with such devastating results throughout its long and bloody history, was effective as long as the conditions of production (i.e., exploitation) favored it. But force alone has never been able to maintain the existence of a social system or the ruling class which dominates it when the material conditions for its existence are crumbling.

The contradiction between the growth of the productive forces and the confines of capitalist private property is derived from another fundamental contradiction: that between the social character of capitalist production and individual private appropriation and ownership which is finally reaching the point in the United States of having fully matured.

It is what Marx long ago called the rebellion of the productive forces, which are social in character, against the capitalist relations of exploitation that confine them. This heralds the coming of a proletarian revolution as the only rational solution to a social crisis threatening to devour society as a whole.

Force, however, is also, as Marx said, “the midwife to revolution.” A billion people on the face of the globe have learned that lesson well. This is a nightmare for the bourgeoisie. It is also the hope of the rest of humanity.



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# Capitalist elections and socialist revolution

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*On Oct. 28, 1980, Marxist thinker and fighter Sam Marcy wrote about a presidential debate between incumbent Democrat Jimmy Carter and Republican Ronald Reagan. An excerpt appears below.*

*This was at the beginning of what Marcy called “the historic reversal which the ruling class is trying to impose upon the working class by embarking on the road to reversing basic and fundamental concessions which the working class and oppressed have won in decades of struggle.” The war of the rich against the rights of the workers and oppressed has continued unabated for 40 years, with the presidency of Donald Trump marking its all-time low (so far).*

On this [the “historic reversal”], both candidates are in full agreement. Their method differs slightly, but their objective is the same. Individual elements in the ruling class may have their preferences for either Reagan’s or Carter’s method. But what

binds the ruling class together in approving both candidates is that Carter and Reagan share a common objective — reversing the previous era of rising expectations among the masses — and are both bent on solving the incurable economic crisis of the ruling class at home by expanding its adventurous role abroad.

A hundred years ago, Frederick Engels, the co-worker of Marx, writing in the still relatively progressive stage of capitalism, wrote that participation of the workers in bourgeois elections is an “index of the maturity of the working class” and of the progress it is making in educating itself for the day when it seizes power. Engels’ impeccably correct statement of his time cannot be wholly regarded as applicable in the circumstances of the imperialist epoch as it has evolved in the U.S. today.

The working class, as an independent class, which was what Engels was writing about, is totally excluded from the bourgeois political process. No avenue whatsoever has been left open for truly independent working-class participation in the U.S. as it has in the European arena and in Engels’ time. On the contrary, the manipulation of the electoral process by the bourgeoisie and the strangulation of virtually all independent forms of initiative and political participation is an index of the deterioration of the ruling-class political system.

Engels’ analysis is, of course, applicable as it concerns the importance of the effort to break through the bourgeois political process by every conceivable method and utilize the bourgeois election, no matter how restrictive or narrow the opportunity may be, so long as it is not an effort to legitimize bourgeois, imperialist parliamentarism, but to undermine its political system in a revolutionary way by exposing it to the masses and educating them in the process.

Because so many working-class organizations in the post-Lenin era have once again fallen prey to the illusion that they can change the system by parliamentary means, as in Europe as well as here, it is all the more necessary not to abandon the political

arena to bourgeois parties or their lackeys.

On the contrary, it is imperative for the working-class vanguard party to unceasingly and energetically pursue the electoral arena as part and parcel of its overall activities in the class struggle, to promote class consciousness among the working class and the oppressed masses, and to prepare for the task of the revolutionary abolition of the rotting system of monopoly capitalism.



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# **Fascism: how it develops and how to fight back**

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*With the 2020 elections fast approaching, the workers' and progressive movements in the U.S. are debating the best tactics to fight the Donald Trump regime and the growth of violent white-supremacist, neofascist groups. As a contribution to this urgent discussion, Struggle-La Lucha is publishing excerpts from two articles by Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th*

*century, about the nature of fascism and how to fight it.*

From ["The specter of fascism,"](#) originally published in December 1993.

## **Bourgeois democracy won in struggle**

Bourgeois democracy is not a gift from the ruling class. It was won in struggle. A capitalist democracy, whether in Britain or France or other countries, is the result of working-class struggles that have forced the bourgeoisie to grant democratic rights.

For all too long there were no rights for the masses in this country. Only property-owning white men could vote. Native people had no rights. In a great section of the U.S., there was chattel slavery. Even after abolition, Black people had no rights at all for many years. Women couldn't vote.

It was only in 1971 that every citizen at least 18 years old was legally enfranchised, although registration is still made difficult enough to discourage many.

So this democracy we have was earned in the course of struggle, including a bloody civil war. Bourgeois politicians, however, give the impression that it is part of the "benefits of capitalism."

But capitalism and democracy are not synonymous. Democracy is a form of state, as is fascism. The essence of a capitalist state is the rule of the bourgeoisie. Capitalism as a system can exist without capitalist democracy.

The working-class movement can thrive and advance if it utilizes capitalist democracy to its own advantage in the struggle to bring about a socialist revolution.

This introduction is necessary because the bourgeoisie never refers to the real significance of the struggle between bourgeois democracy and fascism. They always give the impression that they are in the forefront of the struggle against fascism and

are the proponents of democracy.

There is nothing the bourgeoisie likes so much as to cover themselves with sugary, unctuous phrases about democracy as long as it seems to serve their ends — and as long as the workers don't use that democracy for their own class interests, but only to advance this or that capitalist politician.

Full-scale fascism means the complete abolition of capitalist democracy. That has happened several times in the 20th century. The experiences in some of the countries of Europe give us object lessons in what fascism is.

### **Lessons of fascism in Europe**

The earliest form of fascism took place in Italy. Later, it took over in Germany and then in Spain.

Why did it come first in those countries? It is often explained as due to the development of a dictatorial mentality in certain individual leaders.

It is said that in Italy it was all Mussolini's fault; that in Germany it was Hitler; and that Franco brought about fascism in Spain. The emphasis is always on the individual and not on the social basis for the rise of that individual.

We do not deny the role of the individual in history. But we ask ourselves why it is that in these particular countries, individuals were able to turn a bourgeois democracy into a fascist dictatorship.

Is it because they were unusual and extraordinary people? Why didn't they do something else? Why didn't they bring about a greater democracy — a socialist democracy? As individuals, how did they build a following strong enough to take power?

The individual becomes important, most of all, if he or she is a representative of a class.

Some capitalist historians will say fascism came as a result of a deep economic crisis. That is true, but it is not the whole truth. Poverty is deeply embedded in so many countries, but that does not necessarily bring a fascist dictatorship. The worst economic crisis that ever took place was in the United States, and it did not bring about a fascist dictatorship. Some fascist groupings did arise, but on the whole, fascism did not take hold here.

But it did in three leading capitalist countries: Germany, Italy and Spain.

What was their common social and political denominator?

### **What turns the bourgeoisie into fascists**

The first prerequisite of classical fascism is the existence of a revolutionary mood in the working class.

In Italy, Spain and Germany there was a revolutionary situation. The working class was on the edge of a socialist revolution. That is what impelled the bourgeoisie to support a fascist dictatorship in its most brutal and complete form.

In these three capitalist countries, the working class had learned to use capitalist democracy to defend its own interests to some extent. There were entrenched elected representatives of workers' parties. They controlled a number of cities and states, were in the legislatures and sometimes in the federal government.

Wherever you went in Europe, socialists and communists had some part in the capitalist state. The workers' movement was strong and seemed unvanquishable.

Under the democratic form of the capitalist state, the workers' movement had

reached a stage in its development where it had become a threat to the very existence of capitalist rule. Even Frederick Engels thought at one point at the end of the 19th century that the workers' movement would take over in Germany. It was the general understanding that as a result of parliamentary means the workers' movement would ultimately rule.

But that turned out to be an illusion.

The ruling class could not easily overcome the great achievements of the working class by mere elections. Even if they could win absolute majorities in a few elections, they could not fundamentally change the class position of the working class. So much had been won that it would take a military struggle to change it. That is where fascism came in.

The bourgeoisie in a number of European countries turned in an utterly different direction. Instead of being the patron saint of bourgeois democracy, they slowly and gradually gravitated toward a violent break with that tradition.

They began to instigate movements for the overthrow of capitalist democracy altogether, as a means to abolish the gains of the workers, and revamp and redesign the form of class rule. Their objective was to develop on a world scale and become the most aggressive group of capitalist countries in order to redivide the colonies in their favor.

### **Personality of leaders not decisive**

The development of fascism didn't have anything to do with the psychological bent of leaders. It didn't have anything to do with an aversion to liberty, free speech and the like.

It had to do with the necessity to sustain the rule of a particular class over another class, to sustain capitalism when it is very much under siege from the workers.

The enormous strength of the workers' organizations on the European arena had frightened the bourgeoisie. The confidence of the workers' movement was such that they were openly speaking not only about the overthrow of the bourgeoisie but also how they would soon govern over society. It was just a matter of time before the ruling class would be out of business.

When a ruling class sees its most substantial interests under siege, it doesn't care much about democracy, freedom or anything else. It is ready to stake its all on retaining its system, even to the point of the loss of millions of lives. It will think of its class interests above all and will throw overboard everything it has taught about democracy, freedom, god or whatever — in the interest of retaining its class position.

This is how the fascist movements developed. Not as an automatic, anti-democratic tendency, but because of the ruling class's organic need to save its class interests and system.

### **What led to Mussolini's takeover**

The first to go over was Italy. The working class was strong in Italy. Even the monarchy did not stand in the way of the workers' organizing. When it did, it was soundly trounced. The workers' movement was also reaching out to the peasants.

In the years immediately after the Russian Revolution, the Italian masses tried to take it all. They organized general strikes and tried to take over all of industry by occupying the plants. They wanted to make short shrift of the slow, eventual growth of the working class — particularly in a country that was not the richest and whose colonies did not bring in the kind of superprofits that Britain, for example, enjoyed.

Under those circumstances, the ruling class instigated the development of fascism by sponsoring Mussolini to open a violent struggle against the working class.

Bourgeois historians write a lot about Mussolini. But they will not tell you how the ruling class conducted itself, what the bankers and industrialists did. What were they doing while the workers were making gains?

Even if Mussolini had organized the fascist coup d'etat on his own, his subsequent stay in power shows support by the ruling class in Italy and by the imperialists as a whole. His march on Rome to “rescue Italy from Bolshevism” and his Black Shirts would have been a temporary thing with no importance had big capital not supported him.

So the first characteristic in the development of a fascist regime of the classical type is the existence of a revolutionary situation caused by the rise of a workers' movement. This in turn causes the capitalist ruling class to abandon capitalist democracy and turn to naked force and violence in the struggle to retain its rule.

True, a fascist dictatorship means that even the bourgeoisie has to give up certain of its rights. Nonetheless, the results of fascism everywhere were to strengthen the ruling class as against the working class.

In Italy, this classical form of fascism existed from 1922 all the way up to the end of World War II, when the workers overthrew Mussolini as a result of their own independent efforts.

## **Fascism in Spain**

In Spain, fascism took a different route. The revolutionary working class developed very rapidly in the 1930s — threatening not only the monarchy but the capitalist system, which was still tied in with all the ancient feudal institutions.

Spain seemed to be the country par excellence where feudal institutions could exist within the womb of capitalist society. It seemed as if the working class was more removed from Marxism than in Italy, Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But this

theory vanished into thin air when the workers' movement went on revolutionary strikes and threatened to topple not only the monarchy but also the capitalist institutions.

There is a legend in the U.S. that the whole struggle in Spain was between democracy and fascism. That is not true. It was between the revolutionary working class and the capitalist class. The bourgeoisie masked itself in a democratic form late in the day.

The existence of an armed and revolutionary working class in Spain compelled the ruling class to appeal to the military. Not being able to convince the entire military to stage a counterrevolutionary insurrection, they got one of the leading militarists — Francisco Franco — to lead an open, violent, counterrevolutionary assault on the workers' movement in 1936. He openly denounced bourgeois democracy as responsible for all the evils in Spain. He got the support of the Catholic hierarchy.

Armed to the teeth, Franco began a bloody extermination of the workers' organizations: the communists, socialists and anarchists.

Fascism was brought about in Spain as retaliation against the workers' movement for daring to take destiny in its own hands. Before the workers could succeed, the bourgeoisie intervened militarily, with no resistance from England, France or the U.S.

### **Why German fascism was so destructive**

In Germany, it was the same, only more dramatic and more destructive.

The workers' movement in Germany was the strongest and most educated in all the world at that time. So many great Marxists had come from there: Marx and Engels, Mehring, Kautsky, Liebknecht and others.

It was the land where socialism seemed to have originated, where the soil seemed ready for a takeover by the socialists and communists.

But that was not to happen, especially given the existence of a world ruling class with its eye sharply focused on the situation. Germany was the center of Europe. A revolution there would change the basis for capitalist society.

I am not unmindful of the policy of the communist parties in these countries; not unmindful of the fear of the Communist Party leadership under Stalin of supporting the German revolution; not unmindful of the politics of the Kremlin at the time and how it dealt with the various situations. That is a history of the struggle between the policy of accommodation and conciliation of the Soviet leadership under Stalin versus the revolutionary program of Trotsky.

In Germany, the bourgeoisie had on its side not only the army and police but outside military organizations that they began to build out of fear that they couldn't rely on the military. The communists and left socialists in the workers' movement began to counter this by building up their own military formations. They all were preparing for what was sure to come: a showdown between the two antagonistic classes.

That is all a matter of documentation. Everyone knew. I remember reading the papers every day at the time to find out about the street struggles in Germany between the communists and the fascists — counting how many the workers won and the Nazis lost, faithfully hoping that the day of reckoning would come.

The Social-Democratic Party was numerically the strongest working-class party. Its electoral strength was enormous. It had not only won seats in the Reichstag (parliament), but had majorities in a number of the smaller cities and strong representation in the larger cities. The Nazis aimed their guns at both socialists and communists.

The workers' parties failed to recognize that the hour of the struggle for power was coming closer and closer, and that electoral gains or losses would not be decisive. The struggle could not be resolved by so-called democratic or constitutional means. Both sides of the barricades were being armed: the workers on the one side and the Nazi goons supported by the ruling class on the other. The question was which side would be ready to strike first.

Trotsky urged the revolutionary workers to be on guard and prepare for insurrection. He also urged the Soviet Union to open up military maneuvers on its Western front and to give courage and support to the communists and the workers' movement.

None of this happened. The Nazis struck first, preparing a frame-up with the Reichstag fire. This demoralized the leadership and paralyzed the working class so that it could not take up arms.

There was a complete failure of leadership by the most developed, most serious, most loved working-class party at the time. It went down to defeat — and that changed the international situation, leading to a bloody war.

From [\*"Marxism and mass action: Strategies for the struggle ahead,"\*](#) published in December 1994

## **What to do next**

The art of revolutionary politics is knowing what to do next. It is okay to theorize about fascism or the strength of the right wing. But our organization differs from a debating society. We must take a firm, indeed revolutionary, stance.

Individuals can change, but the ruling class's trend is toward repression, solidifying in the most undemocratic way possible its control over the resources of the country and indeed of the globe. U.S. imperialism is on the march everywhere. The

devastating results fall on the backs of the workers at home as well.

What do we do? We know the right wing is moving, and that there is only a thin difference between the right and the ultraright.

One of the great lessons of the 1930s was Leon Trotsky's writings on the question of how to fight fascism. He stressed how important it is not to overlook what is happening, how it is possible to lose the historic moment and allow the ruling class to be victorious.

He delineated in a dramatic and readable way [the steps that led to the victory of fascism in Germany](#).

In the U.S. at that time there were only the beginnings of fascist groupings. No sooner did the wave of reaction sweeping Europe reach these shores than the great sit-down strikes among the workers wiped them out completely.

They were never able to get a foothold among the workers. The myriad of small fascist groups were washed away by the upsurge of the working class.

That is the surest way to end any fascist attempt to establish itself as a political force over the working class.

There's been no experience here with fascism on a mass scale. So we are basically looking at a theoretical and ideological discussion.

Our task is not to wait until things happen, in which case you can be absolutely sure the liberal bourgeoisie as well as certain sections of the big bourgeoisie will get into it. Right now, the working class is either indifferent or apathetic in this great struggle.

The possibility for the growth of neofascism, if you can call it that, and for political

reaction generally is in the soil because monopoly is growing. The contradiction between the forms of capitalist production and the forms of capitalist distribution grows wider and wider.

The struggle among the imperialist nations grows sharper. There is no tendency toward political equilibrium there.

None of the small countries that were actual colonies and became independent has shown any move toward economic independence. They would like to do it but cannot because of the monstrous growth and position of the big banks and corporations over the entire planet.

### **Opportunity for a mass struggle**

We can go to the masses and promote tremendous activity to challenge the capitalist class. We needn't be fearful about going beyond the legal limits that the bourgeoisie constrains us to. On a picket line, you never know when you're going to get arrested, but you don't say, "Don't have the picket line." That kind of talk leads to failure. ...

In the 1930s, the Communist Party and other organizations were very conscious of the growth of fascism. But to a large extent they were trying to win the big bourgeoisie to support the struggle against it.

There is nothing wrong with asking them to support the struggle against fascism, but it's another thing to expect it from them. We have to explain this to the most oppressed and persecuted people, in the Black and Native and Latino districts. Fascism should not be an after-dinner conversation with bourgeois liberals. ...

Marxism is as Marxism does. It is not merely an exposition of the tendencies in capitalist society that inevitably lead it to destruction. It is also a means for arming the workers and oppressed people on how to proceed in the next period.

Are we mainly directing our attention to the program of the right-wing Republicans? No. We shouldn't leave the other Republicans and the Democrats off the hook.

To make it very clear, our struggle against the right wing is an extension of our general program and not some new development on our part. We are going to conduct a revolutionary and working-class struggle in the way we have conducted them before, with greater emphasis on developing an initiative in the struggle against the right wing and the neofascist tendencies that may spring up now and then.



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## **Black labor from chattel slavery to wage slavery**

written by Struggle - La Lucha  
July 28, 2021



*Black August commemorates the Aug. 7, 1970, raid on the Marin County Courthouse led by young revolutionary Jonathan Jackson, and the Aug. 21, 1971, assassination of Black Panther prison organizer George Jackson at San Quentin Prison. Every year, revolutionaries use this month to uplift the Black liberation struggle, especially the cause of political prisoners.*

*In this spirit, Struggle-La Lucha presents this selection from Chapter 2 of Sam Marcy's [High Tech, Low Pay: A Marxist analysis of the changing character of the working class,](#) first published in 1986. It explains why Black workers and the fight*

*against racism and national oppression are central to the class struggle in the U.S.*

The scientific-technological revolution has affected and will continue to affect Black workers much more significantly than is commonly acknowledged by the capitalist press. Automation takes even more than its usual toll when oppressed people are concerned. It intensifies racist oppression and increases unemployment among Black people even when a capitalist economic recovery is said to be sharply on the rise, as in 1983-1984.

But the impact of the scientific-technological revolution on Black people is not only a recent phenomenon. It has historical roots that go back to the beginnings of the slave trade.

## **The compass and the slave trade**

The speed and momentum with which the scientific-technological revolution has taken off in recent years has tended to shrink into insignificance inventions which exercised a profound influence on developing social relations in the early stages of the capitalist system. Take the compass, which is regarded today as a basic direction-finding device in navigation. It is not a capitalist invention. It is said to have been discovered as early as the year 1100 in China, and may have also been discovered independently in Europe somewhat later; it was used by Arab sailors in the early 13th century.

Its development and perfection over the years became indispensable to world trade. While not invented in a period of capitalist development, the compass and other navigational instrumentation were appropriated from earlier modes of production by capitalist shipping companies at the very crest of the period of colonization, what is called the “age of discovery.” It gave a tremendous impulse to world trade and commerce.

But what was the content of this trade? Why is it important in relation to our study here? Because as trade became a world phenomenon, it was essentially an international trade of slaves.

Millions upon millions of Black people were kidnapped, tortured and brought on slave ships to the vast new continents of the Western Hemisphere. The slave trade began in the mid-15th century, when Spain and Portugal began importing a significant number of Black slaves to their plantations on the Canary and Madeira islands. Most of the very same leading imperialist powers that are today concerned with maintaining the South African regime in the face of the revolutionary mass movement there earlier participated in, promoted and in fact fought ferociously to maintain the slave trade and obtain a monopoly over it.

Modern transnational monopolies differ fundamentally in their economic content from those days, but they still show the same greed and avarice, the utterly unprecedented cruelty and barbarous treatment which characterized the slave trade. This is what lay behind the flourishing of world commerce, and laid the development for what Marx later called the primitive accumulation of capital. The word primitive was not a characterization of the many millions of people captured as slaves. The term primitive was applied to the fiendish method by which the early capitalists accumulated the primary, original capital that was so indispensable for the development of their system of oppression and exploitation. Not only Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland, but also Denmark, Sweden and Prussia participated, garnering fabulous profits as a result of the slave trade.

The compass was one of the things that made the slave trade possible, but it alone can't be held responsible for the transportation of this vast number of human beings from one continent to another thousands of miles away — away from their homeland and loved ones to a strange new country where the whip and the gun held them at bay. Scandinavian people had made a transoceanic voyage earlier, in the 12th

century. They too may have had a compass of a sort, for it is well known that the Vikings undertook long voyages and established settlements in Iceland, Greenland and even Labrador.<sup>1</sup> But these voyages differed fundamentally in that they were oriented toward settlements in the northern part of the world in harmony with the climatic conditions of the Scandinavian countries.

Until the development and perfection of navigational instrumentation such as the compass, the Western world was mainly confined to the Mediterranean and the coastal areas of the Atlantic so far as maritime commerce was concerned. The new era of discovery and colonization opened up the Atlantic for the first time. This could not have been done without the necessary technological improvements in navigational instrumentation as well as in the design of ships.

By 1745, the English inventor Gowin Knight had perfected a method of efficiently magnetizing needles of harder steel. He designed a compass with a single bar needle large enough for a cap resting on the pivot to be screwed into its center. He thus greatly improved the compass.<sup>2</sup> This significantly shortened the time of voyages, increased the safety of the ships and, what is of greater social and political significance, increased the volume of slavery.

As Marx was to write, “It is slavery that gave the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have created world trade, and it is world trade that is the precondition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.”<sup>3</sup>

The contract for supplying slaves to the Spanish colonies was called the Asiento. While British slave traders provided the necessary laborers for their own plantations, Spain contracted with the slave traders of other nations to supply its needs. The first Asiento was granted in 1518 to a Flemish company, and it specified that a certain number of tons (!) of slaves be delivered to the Spanish colonies.<sup>4</sup>

The Portuguese were the first traders to hold the Asiento, but the other rising capitalist powers were not to be outdone. The Dutch broke into this very lucrative form of trade around 1640 and Spain, France and Britain followed soon after.

The war for the Asiento continued until the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), when the English triumphed over their competitors. The English bourgeoisie from then on maintained control of the slave trade through the Royal African Company. This slave trade covered not only the English, French and Dutch colonies in America and the West Indies but also the vast land of Brazil. It was in this way that such a vast portion of the African people were uprooted and thrown into the vortex of capitalist slavery.

In connection with Holland it should be noted that earlier, in the years 1636-1637, the Dutch had engaged in a flourishing trade and development of tulips, for which they are still world famous today. But that trade attained extraordinary speculative proportions, so that at one period just one tulip was valued at thousands of dollars. Eventually, the market broke and the Dutch bourgeoisie turned from trafficking in "a thing of matchless beauty" to the slave trade, one of the most odious, foul and certainly the most inhuman forms of commerce ever seen in history. This illustrates with what ease and facility the capitalists can plunge from one area to another in their insatiable appetite for profits, without any regard for human values whatsoever. The latter are totally irrelevant in the process of capitalist production. Capital simply flows to wherever profits are highest.

## **The banks and the drug trade**

The world slave trade has been superseded by the world drug trade. It has been widely reported that today marijuana, whose cultivation is illegal, has become the single most valuable cash crop in U.S. agriculture. This should not surprise anyone in light of the fact that some of the biggest banks have been fined millions of dollars

for laundering money, that is, disguising deposits from the criminal underworld engaged in the sale of not only marijuana but heroin and cocaine. The age of telecommunications has made it possible for the banks and the criminal underworld to work as partners.

The underworld, even if not part of the establishment, can't help but integrate themselves with the banks. They want the interest on their money! Drug busts used to yield amounts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This then escalated into the millions. Recently, some drug busts have netted loot worth more than a billion dollars! It has escalated because it is so lucrative — like the slave trade. And what is the interest on a billion dollars? At just 6 percent, it comes to sixty million dollars. The banks have to get involved in the drug trade, because it is a lucrative source of deposits which are then loaned out at a profit.

The summits of high finance are involved. Among the banks caught red-handed have been Bank of America, the biggest in the country, and the First Boston Corporation. Bank of America was fined \$4.75 million and First Boston half a million. Chase Manhattan, Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Chemical, Crocker National and Irving Trust Company have had to pay civil penalties ranging from \$210,000 to \$360,000 for reported violations.<sup>5</sup> ... What are they hiding? The deposit of profits from the criminal underworld engaged in destructive drug trafficking which takes an especially great toll in the oppressed communities. Legality and illegality coexist under the capitalist system and always have. Even after the slave trade was outlawed, it continued despite harsh penalties, as does the drug trade.

At a time when the banks are so heavily involved in unrecoverable loans worth hundreds of billions of dollars in connection with the indebtedness of oppressed countries, how many would not resort to this most modern and technologically advanced artifice to support their credit positions?

The observations made over a century ago by a certain T.J. Dunning, and quoted by

Marx in "Capital," ring all too familiar today: "With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 percent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 percent certain will produce eagerness; 50 percent, positive audacity; 100 percent will make it ready to trample all human laws; 300 percent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged. If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave trade have amply proved all that is here stated."<sup>6</sup> †

## **The invention of the cotton gin**

While the compass as a technological device in the field of navigation was appropriated by the developing bourgeoisie from an earlier mode of production dating back many hundreds of years, the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 belonged strictly to the era of capitalist development. Its invention was called forth by the development of capitalist trade and commerce. Its influence on slavery was stupendous.

A great deal has been written about Eli Whitney as the inventor of the cotton gin and as a great scientist, which he certainly was. However, according to some accounts,<sup>7</sup> the first cotton gin made in Mississippi was constructed on the basis of a crude drawing by a skilled slave. This was probably not very unusual in light of the fact that even among the first slaves brought to this country from Africa, many were skilled craftspeople. Also, in both the South and the North there were skilled free Blacks. Since the slaves were never recognized in law as persons, the slave owners could appropriate their property as well as any inventions they might conceive of.

The cotton gin has often been described as the very soul of simplicity. However, it should be borne in mind that cotton has been spun, woven and dyed from the earliest times. Cotton formed the staple cloth of India, Egypt and China. Hundreds of years before the Christian era, cotton textiles were woven in India with matchless

skill and their use spread to the Mediterranean countries. In the first century, traders brought fine muslin and calico to Italy and Spain. The Arabs introduced the cultivation of cotton into Spain in the 9th century. By the 17th century, the East India Company was bringing rare fabrics from India.

Before the arrival of the Europeans in the Americas, cotton was skillfully spun there and woven into fine garments and dyed tapestries. Fabrics were found in Peruvian tombs that even belonged to pre-Inca cultures. Cotton was first planted by the Europeans in Virginia's Jamestown Colony in 1607.

The so-called Cotton Belt in the U.S., where cotton has historically been the main cash crop (now marijuana is!), extends through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, west Tennessee, east Arkansas, Louisiana, east Texas, and south Oklahoma, and also in smaller areas of southeast Missouri, southwest Kentucky, north Florida, and southeast Virginia. But prior to the invention of the cotton gin, cotton production was at a very low level. It was almost insignificant in the prevailing Southern economy. The plantation system rested mainly on tobacco and to a lesser extent on rice and indigo.

Rarely has an important technological development taken place which was as simple as the cotton gin. It separated the seeds from the cotton through a process using a cylinder with bent spikes sharpened to form hooks. They were set in a ring and revolved through slots in a bar. The teeth pulled away the lint, which was then cleaned from the teeth by brushes. A hand crank operated the whole machine.

What did this machine accomplish? As Eli Whitney himself explained in a letter, "The machine makes the labor 50 times less without throwing any class of people out of business."<sup>8</sup> Of course, the slave economy was not characterized by unemployment, unlike wage slavery.

The cotton gin tremendously increased the productivity of Black slave labor on the

plantations. The figures in cotton crop production speak for themselves. In 1790, before the use of the cotton gin, the cotton crop of the U.S. amounted to 1.5 million pounds. By 1800, it had risen to 35 million pounds. By 1810, it had soared to 85 million pounds, and by 1860, it reached the astonishing sum of 2 billion pounds.

The introduction of the cotton gin thus brought about a profound social revolution. A machine that could increase the productivity of labor 50 times was nothing less than sensational. It thoroughly revolutionized Southern agriculture as well as Northern production methods.

Furthermore, it was in response to the tremendous social transformation evoked by the Industrial Revolution in England, which had brought about a skyrocketing demand for cotton and a sharp price increase. As Marx explained it in broader terms, "A radical change in the mode of production in one sphere of industry involves a similar change in other spheres. This happens at first in such branches of industry as are connected together by separate phases of a process, and yet are isolated by the social division of labor, in such a way, that each of them produces an independent commodity. Thus spinning by machinery made weaving by machinery a necessity, and both together made the mechanical and chemical revolution that took place in bleaching, printing, and dyeing, imperative. So too, on the other hand, the revolution in cotton-spinning called forth the invention of the gin, for separating the seeds from the cotton fiber; it was only by means of this invention, that the production of cotton became possible on the enormous scale at present required."<sup>9</sup>

But how did it affect slavery itself, this "peculiar institution" as it was called at the time? Did the sensational, spectacular development in technology retard slavery or expand it?

From the time school children attend their earliest classes they are taught about the wonders of modern science and what a liberating influence it has. Did the cotton gin at the time help to weaken slavery, as the general conceptions cultivated and

promoted by the bourgeoisie maintain? As we shall see, it strengthened slavery. And this happened at a time when it appeared (although it was only appearances) that slavery was in a decline.

Here it is necessary to look at the currents of thought which gave political expression to this phenomenon. For instance, the Continental Congress of 1774 proposed that the practice of importing slaves be stopped. Rhode Island and Connecticut passed laws providing that all chattel slaves brought within their respective provinces be freed, and Delaware prohibited the importation of bondsmen in 1776. Later, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina and Maryland all forbade the importation of slaves.

The slave trade itself, of course, was finally prohibited in the U.S. more than a decade after the introduction of the cotton gin, in 1808. But it should not be forgotten that the Constitutional Convention of 1788 wrote a clause into the Constitution making it impossible as a matter of federal law to abolish the slave trade on a national basis before 1808.

The demise of the slave trade has to be viewed in the light of class interests, first of the slavocracy itself. Why would they, as slave owners, be interested in abolishing it? Why, for instance, would George Mason of Virginia, himself a slave owner and supporter of slavery, condemn the slave trade as "diabolical itself and disgraceful to mankind"? [10](#)

Only by piercing the veil of capitalist hypocrisy, only by going behind the political rhetoric and seeking out the materialist interests of any given class, only by applying the materialist interpretation of history and analyzing social and political phenomena in terms of class interests, can we understand the politics, the social and political values. Thus, the basic reason behind abolishing the importation of slaves even in the above-named Southern states and castigating the trade as a "disgrace to mankind" was the fact that there had been a huge influx of slaves. Like the excessive

influx of any commodity governed by the law of supply and demand, this cheapened the price of a slave. The reasons behind it were economic in origin, masked in moralistic phraseology.

A surplus of slaves in some of the Southern states motivated the agitation against further importation. Most of this agitation, it should be noted, was before the use of the cotton gin really took off on a mass scale, producing unprecedented profits.

But there was also opposition to the slave trade motivated by an entirely different set of circumstances. This was a thoroughgoing revolutionary development which is highly obscured in U.S. history, particularly as it relates to the early struggles of the Black people before the Civil War. This revolutionary development fired the imagination of the enslaved Black people in this country and frightened the ruling class, both North and South.

## **The Haitian Revolution and U.S. slave revolts**

This inspiring event was the successful revolution in Haiti led by its famous hero, Toussaint L’Ouverture. This great revolutionary development overthrew French colonial rule and then defeated massive British, Spanish and French interventionist forces in one of history’s really brilliant political and military upsets. Unfortunately, the significance of this great revolutionary development has been obscured and dimmed in this century, especially over the past few decades, by the existence of the U.S.-supported Duvalier dictatorship over the Haitian people. Now that the Haitian masses are once again rising to shape their own destiny, the significance of the Haitian Revolution is sure to be rehabilitated.

Both in France and here in the U.S., the master class referred to the Haitian revolutionaries as “Black Jacobins,” after the most radical and determined party in the French Revolution, which had helped to inspire the Haitian Revolution. The Jacobins had attempted to go beyond the confines of the emerging capitalist system

in France.

The Haitian Revolution of 1791-1803 established the first republic in the vast colonized area of the Caribbean and Latin America. But it remained isolated. It wasn't until this century that the Mexican Revolution, the brilliant achievements of the Cuban Revolution, the developing revolution in Nicaragua, and the many national liberation efforts throughout the Western Hemisphere began the long-delayed overthrow of imperialist domination in this hemisphere. This struggle has yet to come to completion and finish the processes begun by the great revolution in Haiti.

The American Revolution itself had unloosed a progressive current against slavery as part and parcel of the independence struggle. Genuine revolutionaries like Thomas Paine and others, unlike many among the "founding fathers," opposed slavery from the viewpoint of real freedom of the people and were not beholden to either the Northern industrialists or the Southern slavocracy.

But the most basic reason why some slave owners and others among the growing bourgeoisie felt the need for restraint on the importation of slaves and even the elimination of slavery was fear of domestic insurrection. This important motivating factor behind the opposition to slavery has not been given the attention it rates. For many, many decades the heroic slave insurrections were completely minimized and given scant attention.

The insurrections given the most detailed accounts in modern literature were those of Gabriel in Virginia (1800), Denmark Vesey in Charlestown, S.C. (1822) and, most famous, that of Nat Turner in South Hampton County, Virginia (1831). [11](#)

However, a great many insurrections took place which are only beginning to be taken note of. The Civil War itself demonstrated many instances of insurrections by the Black people. The Black masses under slavery were not the passive, docile force

imagined by bourgeois historiography, especially in the literature predating the mass movement of Black people in this century.

Black rebellions go back in history to the very beginnings of slavery in this country. As early as 1687, “one year previous to the Glorious Revolution in the mother country,” the revolution in England that consolidated the power of the bourgeoisie as against the old feudal aristocracy, there was “widespread revolt throughout the colonies and at a time when the Negro population of the Old Dominion was about equal to that of whites. ... That was the attempted insurrection in Northern Neck.”<sup>12</sup> All were executed when the plot was discovered and the revolt was crushed.

How interesting, in light of present-day developments in South Africa, that the Virginia Council placed a ban on public funerals for the dead slaves in fear that they would bring out mass demonstrations and might even provoke another rebellion!

One thing to remember in connection with the early slave insurrections is that they were influenced politically by the English Revolution and, much more profoundly, by the French Revolution. The great revolutions of this century (especially in Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam and Angola, and now the emerging revolutionary struggle in South Africa) have also had the most profound effect among the exploited and oppressed masses everywhere.

The spectacular success of the cotton gin in raising the productivity of labor of the slaves tremendously strengthened the South, strengthened slavery and impelled the slaveholders to become not only more aggressive and bellicose but, far more important, more expansionist. Slavery drove into the Southwest and everywhere it could in order to expand its plantations and garner in unprecedented profits. Cotton production was extensive in character, appropriating more and more land, rather than intensively applying mechanical devices. It drove the slaves harder and harder, often beyond endurance.

But the very invention which had become such a tremendous advantage to the Southern planters, like all social phenomena, soon began to develop one of the sharpest social contradictions which ultimately would undo the slavocracy altogether.

## Slavery vs. capitalist production

The South was a slavocracy based on an ancient mode of production within the geographical confines of a new world social order, the bourgeois social order with its own mode of capitalist production. One of the fundamental differences between the bourgeois mode and older modes of production so eloquently brought out in the "Communist Manifesto" is that "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society." [13](#)

How does this stack up with the Southern slavocracy? Marx continued, "Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was ... the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes." The South tried to retain the old slavocracy not only in unaltered form but in extreme rigidity. It was, therefore, on a collision course with the new bourgeois order, with the process of capitalist production and its tremendous growth in the North.

Another and more flagrant contradiction was that one of the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist mode of production is wage slavery, which means a free proletarian, that is, a worker free to sell his or her labor on the capitalist market. Capitalist production and the extraction of surplus value in the interest of further capitalist accumulation is virtually impossible without a free working class, free to be exploited and oppressed, free to be unemployed. Chattel slavery was thus thoroughly incompatible with wage slavery.

Slavery as an economic institution has everywhere proved itself uneconomical. This

is especially true when it depends on one great crop such as cotton, with diminishing reliance on sugar, rice and other products. The South was turning into a monocultural economy.

Over all, the spectacular leap in technology on which the Southern planters depended so heavily to maintain slavery was only one of many scientific and technological developments in an era which was rapidly turning them out in greater and greater numbers. In this respect the South was falling far behind the North.

The North was making all the great strides in science and technology. It built up great universities which became centers for basic research. Whatever prominence the South had had in science in the earlier days, it was losing to the North. Seen in terms of the contemporary struggle in technology of the U.S. against Japan and Western Europe, the South was steadily losing ground to the North in what we would call today the technological race.

As a competing form of economic and social system compared to the social system based on capitalist production, slavery was hopelessly out of place and had no chance, save by the use of sheer force. Slavery was static, fixed and extremely rigid in its form of production. It was also characterized by the most outlandish forms of cruelty and brutality. The capitalist system, on the other hand, while certainly not characterized by either compassion or humanity, was nevertheless "revolutionizing" its means of production, that is, it was advancing science and technology. The change from chattel slavery to wage slavery was a profoundly revolutionary change, a tremendous social transformation. But historically it constituted a change in the form of exploitation, not its abolition.

Thus, we see that while the first phase of the scientific-technological revolution brought fabulous profits to the South and gave it the power to expand, it ultimately undid slavery. Just as technological change undermined the Southern slavocracy, so will it make obsolete the present industrial financial plutocracy with its system of

wage slavery.

## Black scientists and inventors

It is beyond the province of this study to give an accounting of the many scientific inventions made, particularly during the last half of this century. The modern epoch in which the bourgeois system of production has predominated has been abundant in scientists and inventors whose contributions have laid the material foundation for present-day society.

However, there has been a systematic attempt in the U.S. to omit the very significant contributions of Black scientists. Popular science books available to the public contain the names of only a small number of Black inventors and scientists.

There are 14 Black scientists who are acknowledged to have made outstanding contributions to science, yet the Encyclopedia Britannica (1980 edition) lists only four. Conspicuously absent is Norbert Rilleux (1806-1894). He is one of three Black scientists who actually revolutionized an industry. In Rilleux's case it was sugar refining. By inventing the vacuum-pan evaporator, he transformed the sugar industry of the world.

That his name could be forgotten in a country which produces and consumes more refined sugar per capita than any other is hard to conceive of except on the basis of flagrant racist prejudice.

Until 1846, sugar cane juice was transformed into sugar by a very primitive, costly and slow process. Rilleux's invention replaced the manual operation with a mechanical one. As Louis Haber tells us in his "Black Pioneers of Science and Invention," [14](#) slaves had formerly transferred the sugar cane juice from one boiling kettle to another by means of long ladles. With Rilleux's device, a single worker could operate the completely enclosed machine through outside valves. It was

Rilleux and George Washington Carver (1860-1943) who rescued the South from being transformed into a hopelessly backward agricultural adjunct to the North, similar to the role played by the southern part of Italy until very recently.

Carver, however, is much too well known throughout the world for his reputation to be obscured. It was Carver's work in soil improvement and the diversification of crops which made him famous. He discovered hundreds of uses for the peanut, the sweet potato and the soybean, and thus stimulated the culture of these important crops. He also derived many products from cotton wastes and extracted blue, purple and red pigments from local clay.

Many industries sprang up as a result of the use of peanut products. It helped to stimulate the Southern economy to the extent that many farmers found it more profitable to engage in the production of peanuts than tobacco.

Carver also demonstrated that from the pecan, which grew well in the South, could be extracted 75 different products. When there was an overproduction of cotton, Carver showed how it could be used to make insulating board, paper, rugs, cordage and even paving blocks for highways.

Carver's achievements were perhaps best summarized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who said upon his death: "The world of science has lost one of its most eminent figures and the race from which he sprang, an outstanding member. ... The versatility of his genius and achievements in diverse branches of the arts and sciences were truly amazing. All mankind are the beneficiaries of his discoveries in the field of agricultural chemistry. The things which he achieved in the face of early handicaps will for all time afford an inspiring example to use everywhere."[15](#)

A third great Black scientist who transformed and revolutionized an entire industry was Jan Matzeliger (1852-1889). Although much less known than his two eminent fellow scientists, he invented what at the time seemed an impossible feat — a

machine which would mass-produce shoes. Matzeliger accomplished for the shoe industry what Eli Whitney's gin did for the cotton industry of the South.

While it's true there were a number of machines in use in the shoemaking industry around the time of Matzeliger's invention, none seemed to have been able to connect the upper to the sole of the shoe. It was believed such a thing could not be done.

Matzeliger's machine did it. It could turn out a complete shoe. At first, the machine made a record run of 75 pairs of women's shoes in one day. Later Matzeliger's machine made as many as 700 pairs of shoes a day. It also reduced the cost of shoes by half and was soon being applied on a worldwide scale.

In industry, there were at least four more Black scientists who made very significant contributions to the development of science and technology but are little known. One was the man who invented the automatic lubrication of machinery, Elijah McCoy (1844-1929), whose work gave rise to the expression "the real McCoy." Before his time, a machine had to be stopped in order to be lubricated.

Then there was Granville T. Woods (1856-1910), who developed so many electrical inventions that he was known as the Black Edison. There was also Lewis H. Latimer (1848-1928) who advanced electric lighting and Garrett A. Morgan (1877-1963) who invented the traffic light.

In this century, a number of Black scientists have made outstanding contributions in the field of health and medicine. Charles R. Drew perfected techniques to preserve blood plasma, which made possible the use of blood banks. Percy L. Julian developed synthetic cortisone which, among other applications, is helpful in combating the pain of arthritis. Lloyd A. Hall found ways to sterilize foods and medical supplies. Ernest E. Just became a leading authority on cell physiology. Louis T. Wright made advances in critical antibiotic research, and Daniel Hale Williams performed the first open heart surgery.

There was, however, one early Black scientist whose special importance, aside from his inventive genius, was in the field of political struggle against oppression and for equality: Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806). In most texts he is described as the surveyor who laid out the city of Washington. But he was much more than that.

Banneker was a scientist, astronomer, mathematician, clockmaker and surveyor. Earlier we alluded to Samuel Slater, the Englishman who invented a textile machine and who, when prohibited from bringing his plans for the machine to this country, memorized the blueprints and then reconstructed the machine from memory. Benjamin Banneker was able to lay out the city of Washington after memorizing much more detailed plans to which he had had only limited access as an assistant.

Originally, a young Frenchman had been given the job of planning and laying out the capital. Banneker was one of his three assistants. The young Frenchman got into a dispute with Thomas Jefferson and as a result took his plans and left for France, leaving Jefferson in the lurch. Banneker stepped forward and volunteered to do the job on the basis of what he retained in his memory. That's how the city was finally laid out.

Banneker made the first clock ever built in the United States. He built it entirely of wood and carved each gear by hand. The clock kept perfect time, and people from all over the country came to see it. Banneker should also be remembered for the almanac he prepared in 1792 and each year thereafter for ten years.

What is politically significant in Banneker's history is that he was the only contemporary of Thomas Jefferson to challenge him on the issue of equality. Every school child is taught that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, which contained this famous sentence: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

But Jefferson was also a wealthy slave owner, and even though he sold off all his slaves toward the end of his life, his concept of equality did not extend to Black people. He had also written that “the Blacks are inferior to the whites in the endowment both of body and mind.” This was no chance statement. The collection of Jefferson’s works demonstrates that these sentiments appeared widely in his writings.

Even though the 18th century became known in history as the Enlightenment, especially the years following the revolutions in the U.S. and France, Jefferson held to his reactionary, racist view of Black people. None of the outstanding leaders at the time directly took Jefferson to task for the flagrant contradiction between the florid language he used in the Declaration of Independence and the ugly practice of slavery, which, in fact, was validated in the Constitution.

It remained for Banneker to use his almanac for this purpose. He attached to it an eleven-page handwritten letter that systematically took apart Jefferson’s lofty proclamation of inalienable rights while at the same time condoning the vicious practice of slavery. This was one of the few — perhaps the only — direct attacks on Jefferson, the man who to this day along with Andrew Jackson is honored by the Democratic capitalist politicians at their annual Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners as a symbol of democracy and freedom.

Banneker’s letter to Jefferson did oblige the latter to back off somewhat. In a letter dated August 30, 1791, Jefferson thanked Banneker: “I can add with truth that nobody wishes more ardently to see a good system commence for raising the condition both of their [Black people’s-S.M.] body and mind to what it ought to be. ... I do see such proofs that you exhibit that nature has given to our Black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colors of men and that the appearance of the want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa and in America.”

Jefferson said he was taking the liberty of sending Banneker's almanac to the French Academy of Sciences because he considered it a document "to which your whole color has a right for their justification against the doubts which have been entertained of them." It is only because of Banneker's struggle for equality and against oppression that Jefferson, who held such an eminent position in U.S. history as a liberal, was forced to retreat somewhat from his racist views.

By way of acknowledgment, it should be said that Louis Haber in his book "Black Pioneers in Science and Invention" has done as much to popularize what was so little known about the achievements of Black scientists as Paul D. DeKruif did for biologists more than a half century ago in his lucid exposition, "Microbe Hunters."

The individual scientist in the modern era of the scientific-technological revolution faces a vastly different world than the one in which Banneker or even Thomas Edison at a later date lived and worked. The role of the individual scientist has been diminished by the emergence of capitalist collectivism in the big business laboratory. Today's vast laboratory complexes are organized and controlled by the mighty corporate giants and employ thousands of scientists. The giant corporations compel all scientific personnel to sign contracts that any inventions they may develop in the course of their work are the property of the company.

Superimposed on them is a labyrinth of laboratories directly controlled by the Pentagon. The great universities of today are intimate collaborators of the Pentagon and few have real independence as to how to allocate their scientific investigations.

One of the truly important scientific inventions of modern times was the transistor. True to the age in which we live, it was developed in the laboratories of Bell Telephone Company in 1948 by American physicists John Bardeen and Walter H. Brattain. How many hundreds of scientific workers helped lay the basis for it is not really taken into account.

When mass layoffs take place, such as we've described with AT&T, what happens to the laid-off scientific personnel? How does it affect the pursuit of their scientific career? In that highly significant layoff, no breakdown was given as to how it affected Black scientific workers, women or other oppressed people. There's not a word as to whether affirmative action has been a factor in the employment of Black, Latin, Asian, Native, Arab and women workers, or whether the layoffs took place in accordance with affirmative action guidelines.

## **The Third World brain drain**

The scientific-technological revolution has had a deleterious effect on Third World scientific personnel and the development of science and inventions. Immediately after World War II, the U.S. embarked on a vast campaign to pirate both the technology and the scientific personnel of the other imperialist countries. It also started to drain the budding development of science and technology in the oppressed countries.

With respect to the imperialist countries, it is well known how right after the war the U.S. brought captured German scientific personnel here to work on rockets and space flight. But it wasn't only from Germany. The British government under Labor Prime Minister Harold Wilson finally restricted what was later called the brain drain by an agreement that limited U.S. pirating of scientists, at least from that area.

While U.S. government policy has been to restrict immigration and imprison and deport so-called illegal, undocumented workers, it has at the same time enticed Third World scientists to the U.S. On the one hand, imperialist policy through a variety of foundations like those endowed by the Fords, Rockefellers and others seems to be constantly exhorting the oppressed countries to modernize, to become innovative and inventive and thereby aid their industrial and technological development. But the truth is that every chance they get to entice Third World

scientists to the U.S., they do so, in complete contradiction to the proclaimed policy. They not only extend the stay of visiting students and professors and encourage them to become citizens but also offer them various monetary inducements.

It is one thing to defend the democratic right of individuals to choose their own domicile. It is another matter if this is part and parcel of a policy of monopoly capitalism to pillage and plunder the resources of Third World countries.

The scientific personnel of less developed countries are in many respects their most precious resource. The brain-drain aspect of the scientific-technological revolution has enhanced, not diminished, U.S. imperialism's intense exploitation of the oppressed people.

## **Black labor today**

Extrapolating from the population figures provided in the 1986 annual report of the National Urban League on the "State of Black America," there are about 28 million Black people in the United States. That's larger than most African countries and larger than most middle-sized countries represented in the United Nations.

By always referring to Black people as a minority, the bourgeois press obscures the class significance of the Black population, which is overwhelmingly working class and which, therefore, especially when taken together with the Latin, Asian and Native population, adds a very significant dimension to the whole character of the working class here.

To regard the Black struggle strictly from the viewpoint of minority-majority is to lose much of its profound social and political implications. What should interest working-class students of the Black struggle, however, is that even these figures, which are probably understated, disclose a social viability which has strong revolutionary potentialities given the conditions we believe are developing that will

give a fundamentally altered social composition to the working class.

To understand the current state of Black labor in the United States, it is necessary to look first at the mass migration of Black people to the North which took on momentum early in the 20th century and reached considerable proportions at the end of World War I. Mass production industries in the U.S. like auto (especially Ford) and steel were in a period of high capitalist development. When this culminated in World War I, it opened the gates of some industries and fields of economic endeavor to Black labor, notwithstanding rank discrimination and entrenched racial barriers.

These were not relaxed. Instead artificial classifications were created so that Black workers doing almost exactly the same work as whites got far lower wages. Nor were barriers lifted in the skilled trades and American Federation of Labor craft unions. These were as rigidly racist in their approach as they had been before World War I. But Black labor continually found ways to gain skills and get skilled jobs despite government, employer and union racial discrimination.

It should always be borne in mind that even the first boatloads of slaves who arrived in this country from Africa brought with them useful skills which were developed even in slave times. In cities like New York and Philadelphia, before the mass migrations from Europe started, there were a considerable number of Black workers in industry who had developed skills. But as more and more white labor from Europe became available, Black workers began to be relentlessly driven out of industry.

These mass migrations from Europe undermined whatever leverage the Black workers might have had in industry, notwithstanding discrimination. Things got more and more difficult for them.

Capitalism as the involuntary promoter of the development of the working class also caused the mass migration of Black agricultural workers from the South to the

North. Notwithstanding the racial barrier or the unemployment as a consequence of the capitalist economic cycle, more and more Black workers got into Northern industry even as the pool of Black unemployed grew.

That most of the central cities of the North and now some in the South have a majority or a very large minority of Black people is objectively due to the transformation of capitalist industry with World Wars I and II. World War II in particular was a much longer war for the U.S. and entailed the construction of many defense facilities. In fact, the entire U.S. industrial apparatus was converted for war purposes and for the first time, full employment became an artificial phenomenon dependent on war spending.

These two objective factors — World Wars I and II — also found an echo beginning in 1950 with the Korean War. In the early 1950s and again during the Vietnam War, employment was artificially propped up by the continuing growth of the defense industries.

If today in cities like Detroit, Chicago, Newark, Philadelphia, New York, Atlanta, Memphis and Birmingham there are large Black populations with some political power, it is not due to any attempt by the ruling class to ameliorate the condition of Black workers or to lighten the burden of discrimination. Rather, it comes as a result of objective development arising out of the organic functioning of the capitalist system and the inevitability of imperialist wars and military interventions abroad. This is not to say that the whole industrial structure of the U.S. is due entirely to imperialist wars, but without them it is difficult to conceive how there could have been such a rapid social transformation in the condition of Black and also white workers.

The mass migration from the South — and back to the South, especially during times of unemployment — is among the objective factors affecting the development of Black labor. The subjective factors arise from the freedom struggle, especially the

struggle of the 1960s.

## **The Black freedom struggle**

It is utterly impossible to understand the contemporary role of Black workers in this country and particularly their situation in the trade union movement without considering them in a broader political framework. A study of Black labor, especially over the last 25 years, that omitted the general political struggle, the freedom struggle of the Black people as a whole, would make for a very constricted and even distorted view of both the great achievements of Black workers in the trade union movement and the equally great if not greater drawbacks of their situation.

Racism has permeated every layer of capitalist society; the trade union movement from its earliest times up to the present has been permeated with chauvinism and vicious discriminatory practices. The trade unions are the most formidable working-class organizations in the country. Aside from temporary retreats and taking into account the long duration of the political reaction, they are bound to become organs of the great struggles for emancipation from both racist oppression and capitalist class exploitation.

But all of this has to be considered in the broader arena of the overall political struggle of Black people, in which the trade unions have certainly been a significant part, but only a part. In reality, what happens there is a reflection of what is going on in the Black struggle as a whole. The great battles of the 1960s and 1970s in particular must be considered in evaluating and analyzing how this reflected itself in the unions.

Just to take one example out of many: In April 1969, some 500 Black workers shut down production at the Ford plant in Mahwah, N.J., for several days. The workers walked out because a foreman called one of the workers "a Black bastard." Although the official UAW leadership urged the workers to return to their jobs, they

nevertheless stayed out until the foreman was ousted from the plant. This was the famous so-called wildcat strike at Mahwah organized by the United Black Brothers, and it represented a significant victory for all the workers.

If this significant victory for the UAW at that period is seen only in the trade union framework, it could present an oddity. But when seen in the larger framework of the overall Black political struggle, one gets a far truer measure of its significance for the local struggle as well as nationally.

There were other significant developments in the UAW that came on the heels of the great 1967 rebellion in Detroit and ushered in a series of electoral victories for the Black workers in the UAW. "Suddenly the UAW leadership stopped the practice of mobilizing opposition to Black candidates in local elections. Within a few months after the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, Black workers were elected as presidents of Local 900 (Ford's Wayne plant), Local 47 (Chrysler Detroit Forge), Local 961 (Chrysler's Eldron Gear), Local 7 (Chrysler), Local 51 (Plymouth), and even Local 1248 (Chrysler Mopar), where only 20 percent of the plant's 989 workers were Black. A Black was elected for the first time as vice-president of Briggs Local 21."<sup>16</sup>

Before the Mahwah struggle took place, there were a considerable number of political rebellions and insurrections of Black people. There was the Harlem rebellion, followed by Watts, Newark and Cleveland, to name only a few, and, of course, the largest of the mass insurrections took place in Detroit. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, there were a total of more than 500 rebellions throughout the whole country.

How then can the struggles of Black workers for equality be seen as strictly trade union struggles? Few if any of the very significant gains made by Black workers could have been attained without the so-called outside struggle, that is, the general political struggle put up by Black people. That was the real catalyst, the basic

generator for the trade union gains, many of which were not only vital but indispensable, considering the long and difficult task to attain equality which still goes on.

What is said about the Black struggle applies equally and to some extent even more to the Latin struggle, the women's struggle and the gay and lesbian struggle. Any gains made in the unions must be related to the broader struggles which generated them. It would, of course, be fruitful to speculate on how different it could have been had the struggles been initiated by the trade union movement rather than being forced upon it. But this is the music of the future, not of the past.

There are about 110 million workers in the U.S. today. In the mid-1980s, only about 17.3 million belonged to unions, as we've discussed earlier. However, there can be no doubt that the union movement will become the fundamental lever for working-class struggle. The anti-labor offensive which has been sweeping the country for several years is bound to produce one of the truly great upsurges of the working class, and this time the union movement will not be in the rearguard but in the vanguard of the struggle as regards Black, Latino, Asian, and Native people, women and lesbians and gay men.

The tardiness of the working-class response to the offensive of the ruling class in the face of such profound political and social reaction can be explained in part by the lack of a mass political party of the working class. The response from the working class, both organized and unorganized, is likely to come as the result of spontaneous outbreaks, which will take the form of trade unionism but not necessarily in the way the trade union officialdom presides over the union movement. What more concrete form it will take we have to leave for events themselves to reveal.

Suffice it to say that the very intensity of the political reaction, generated by the Reagan administration and prepared earlier by the Carter administration and its predecessors, has created the conditions for a tumultuous social upheaval, not a

controlled one that could be easily manipulated by contemporary bourgeois politicians and the trade union bureaucracy. The very tardiness in preparing a party of the working class, which in Europe and other areas has taken generations to build up, makes inevitable that the pent-up rage at the oppression and exploitation endured by all strata of the working class will break out in another form. It would seem to emanate most easily from the workplace and from the vast pool of unemployed. The special oppression of women, Black, Latin, Asian, Arab and Native workers will make them a magnet for one another.

A former science adviser to Reagan in late 1985 told a Cable News Network (CNN) interviewer that "unemployment in Western Europe constitutes the greatest danger to Western civilization." Of course, it's true! But not only in Europe. The capitalist "recovery" here in the U.S. has been taking place amidst some 15 million unemployed, if comprehensive calculations are made. Social peace cannot be maintained on such an explosive material base.

## **The impact of high tech on Black postal workers**

In attempting to evaluate the impact of the scientific-technological revolution on Black workers as well as other oppressed people, it is best to avoid focusing our analysis on a narrow sector of industry. Also, while the influence of high tech has been most profound in industries such as auto, electric and steel, we have already dealt with these areas in some measure.

We are also deliberately avoiding areas where racist or sexist discrimination is most pronounced, or where Black, Latin and women workers still constitute only a very small portion of the workforce. A broad sector of the economy, where there are a significant number of Black, Latin and women workers, is more appropriate for this study.

By taking a sector of the economy where so-called optimum conditions prevail,

where racist and sexist oppression is generally regarded as less significant than in other areas, we are better able to illustrate our theme, namely, that high tech results in low-wage jobs and unemployment in all sectors of the economy. This explains why we have chosen what seems like an unlikely area, the U.S. Postal Service, for this study. Furthermore, it is probably the oldest service industry in the country, being created around the time of the U.S. Constitution in 1789.

Though racism may be a less significant factor in the Postal Service than in some other areas, nevertheless, this is the current situation for Black postal workers:

"Blacks appear to be concentrated in less future-oriented Postal Service jobs. When racial concentration versus dispersal of employees in the Postal Service is analyzed, Blacks appear to be concentrated in the lower range and low-paying jobs (levels 1-6). In contrast, in grade levels 7 to 38, 90 percent of the postal employees are nonminority. Thus, the mode of substitution in this case is by a targeted racial distribution in which Blacks are concentrated in the jobs most likely to be affected by technology, particularly the nine-digit zip code, automated mail processing and flat sorting technology and the electronic message systems."<sup>17</sup> The same is true for Latin and other oppressed people.

During the depths of the Great Depression, work at the post office was considered the best and most secure job for anybody from a working-class family. Even today, assuming there are openings, it probably offers more job security for a young person from a working-class family than other areas. However, a great transformation is underway here too, although it is not publicly recognized.

In 1970, during the Nixon administration, Congress enacted the Postal Reorganization Act (PRA). With this new law, the government took decisive steps that were to have far-reaching significance for many millions of workers. For the postal workers, it began a chain of developments concerning the dispatching, processing and delivery of mail, which ultimately resulted in a loss of almost 100,000

jobs as of 1983.

The PRA was the first early warning of what has become a virtual daily phenomenon, the so-called deregulation of industry, whose principal aim and function, despite claims of modernization by the ruling class, is to ditch restraining and protective labor legislation and to get into private hands anything they feel can be profitable.

The PRA made a so-called independent agency of the Postal Service, which had been regarded as a full-fledged arm of the government with representation in the Cabinet since way back in 1828. The act reduced the status of the post office and turned it into an agency of the executive branch with an eleven-person board of governors, nine of them appointed by the President with the approval of the Senate, and a Postmaster General who is responsible to the President.

The whole idea was to gradually shrink the vast and complex network of postal services, introduce a series of technological innovations and put it on a so-called business basis. The income and outgo of funds were to be equalized and eventually a net surplus was to be produced in the same way as in private industry.

What has really happened since the PRA went into effect?

Despite the decline in the number of postal workers from 756,000 in 1970 to 660,000 in 1983, the Postal Service has increased its piece volume by more than 20 billion. In 1981 alone, mail volume reached a record 110 billion pieces.

Despite this growth in productivity, however, in the last contract, announced on Dec. 24, 1984, the government through an arbitration panel imposed a notorious two-tier wage pattern on the American Postal Workers Union and the National Association of Letter Carriers. This meant a 25 percent wage cut for workers hired after a certain date. In time, this lower wage may apply to all workers unless a combined effort of all the unions, not only the postal unions, is mobilized against it throughout the

country. (The two-tier system of wage levels first got a foothold in none other than the Boeing company, one of the pillars of high technology in the aerospace industry.)

At the same time, notwithstanding the government's bold talk about private enterprise standing on its own feet, it has continued a long line of luscious contracts to the big corporations which supply the materials to the Postal Service. In addition, the government is trying to weaken the "no-layoff clause" in the postal workers' contract.

The unions have a real job on their hands whenever they have to face the government in high-tech negotiations, particularly with the restriction on their right to strike and after what the Reagan administration did with its vicious union busting against the air traffic controllers (PATCO).

The new relationship of the government, particularly Congress, to the postal workers can be seen in the drastic decline in postal appropriations and share of operating expenses over the fiscal years 1971-1983. A reactionary Congress and a reactionary White House have combined through the Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan years to steadily cut down the amount of appropriations for the post office and let the broad public carry the weight of financing postal operations.

Of course, in those years all other vital services by federal and state governments were also cut down. But what is necessary to distinguish here is that the entire strategy has been geared toward investment in the mechanization of the dispatching, processing and delivery of postal services. A significant portion of the appropriations has been devoted to the automation of mail processing — the installation of optical character readers and bar code sorters in major post offices. All this is bound to squeeze out more workers.

The aim of this automation is to save nearly a billion dollars a year in labor costs — which means that the jobs of many more workers, especially Black, Latin and women

workers, are at peril. An official history published by the Postal Service itself says that “after the introduction of ZIP+4 in 1983, the first delivery phase of the new OCR (optical character readers) channel sorters and BCS (bar code sorters) was completed by mid-1984. When fully implemented and used with the expanded ZIP+4 codes, the automated system will save an estimated \$960 million annually in labor costs alone.”<sup>18</sup>

What happened to the electronic mail delivery service is instructive for seeing how the big corporations allow new technologies to be developed at government expense only to take them over themselves. The U.S. government first developed electronic computer-originated mail (E-COM), which went into service in 1982. It allowed large-volume mailers to transmit messages via computer to selected post offices, where they were printed out, placed in envelopes and delivered by letter carriers. But then a group of large, private, multinational companies, including UPS, Federal Express and Western Union, instigated the antitrust division of the Justice Department to file a suit charging the Postal Service with unfair competition because of the low rates charged. Although the post office won, the so-called independent Postal Rate Commission then demanded that the E-COM rates be doubled, which finally forced the government to abandon that part of the delivery of electronic mail which pertains to domestic use. However, the government continues to maintain the service called Intelpost, which is an electronically transmitted international service.

The struggle by the big carriers to dismantle the Postal Service was foreshadowed by a big business-inspired article in the June 1979 Forbes magazine entitled, “Do we really need the postal service?”

Here it is necessary to demonstrate the close link that now exists between the Postal Service and the entire telecommunications industry. Real competition from any number of services in private industry operates as a goad to the Postal Service

management to follow suit with each and every new mechanical innovation showing promise of reducing costs and hence the unit cost of labor. Essentially, that is what really lies behind all cost-reducing programs.

In the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the PRA was passed, AT&T carried out one of its devastating assaults on the mass of telephone operators, which took a huge toll on Black, Latin and women workers especially.

What happened at AT&T has exceptional relevance to the situation of the postal workers. Even at that time, it had become clear that the telecommunications industry had tremendous influence in the government, and that the enactment of the PRA would begin active competition between private industry and the postal service, in the process liquidating many thousands upon thousands of jobs.

However, the postal workers saw the Postal Reorganization Act in an entirely different context. They had just gone through their first and most important strike, which, despite some concessions, had won legitimacy for their union. This was accomplished even though Nixon sent the U.S. Army into the post offices of the great metropolitan areas of the country in an effort to intimidate and break the workers' resistance. That the postal workers were able to survive this and grow in strength explains why they won subsequent gains and concessions from the government.

In all this, the historical background of the Postal Service should not be forgotten. Like other institutions of U.S. capitalism, it has been profoundly segregationist since the beginning. It was not until 1865, the last year of the Civil War, that the laws prohibiting — yes prohibiting! — Black people from carrying mailbags from stagecoach to post office were abolished.

Racism has continued during the many decades thereafter, partly as a result of outright discrimination by white organized unions. The founding of the National

Alliance of Postal Workers in 1913 marked a milestone in self-help organizational mediums by Black workers when the leadership of white organized unions would not open their doors to Black workers.

It was not until the 1940s that Black, Latin and women workers were more freely admitted to the unions under the impact of many profound social changes, most important of which was the civil rights struggle and the upsurge of the labor movement as a whole. This finally made it possible for Black, Latin and women workers to take advantage of employment opportunities in the Postal Service.

Even now, despite attrition and pending future layoffs, “minorities [since 1978] have steadily increased as a proportion of total Postal Service employment.” Thus, in the fiscal year 1981, a year of big layoffs as a result of the capitalist recession all over industry, “the Postal Service hired 10,064 Blacks, 2,765 Hispanics and 2,289 other minorities for a total of 15,118 or 27.6 percent of new employees.”<sup>19</sup>

Of course, with anticipated future employment reductions, the picture is not encouraging, particularly if one takes into account the direction the government is taking in pushing the replacement of workers with sophisticated technology. It is more and more geared to the telecommunications industry, of which the government is the principal supporter and promoter.

However, the future of women is a different matter. Female postal employment is predicted to rise while the proportion of Black workers as a whole is expected to remain constant.

The dispatch and delivery of mail are a component of the transportation and communications industry. Like railroad workers, truck drivers and waterfront workers, postal workers participate in the freight-handling process. Transportation facilitates the circulation of capitalist commodities and the scientific-technological revolution has accelerated this process. What automation has done in the Postal

Service is another form of what containerization did in the shipping and maritime industries. The postal workers must view themselves as part of the communications, telecommunications and transportation industries with whom they have so much in common.

The employers and the capitalist state have a sustained and abiding interest in artificially keeping the workers in these industries apart and separated. They do this all the more to divide Black and white. However, the scientific-technological revolution has forged a new link between a variety of industries which hitherto seemed to be very separated. It has opened up a new vista, a new horizon which lays out and broadens the basis for working-class solidarity.

The capitalist system in its early stages needed a government postal service in order to develop capitalist industry and communications as a whole. It could not have developed the productive forces without almost two centuries of a government-sponsored postal service. Now, with the development of telecommunications, the government wants to ditch that part of the service which is no longer lucrative for big business and high finance, and retain that portion which still facilitates big business, while holding a club over the heads of the postal workers through compulsory no-strike mediation and arbitration.

Union leaders must make particularly clear that there is absolutely no valid reason why the capitalist government should be able to dictate the wages and working conditions of the postal workers and at the same time deprive the workers of their right to strike. The Postal Service is but one segment of the telecommunications industry, as are RCA, GE or AT&T. It is really one connected industry and the demand should be made to remove the anti-strike clause against the postal workers.

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# **Should workers support police unions?**

written by Struggle - La Lucha  
July 28, 2021



*This article first appeared Jan. 29, 1971, headlined "The year of the pig: Should workers support police strikes?" On the Chinese calendar, 1971 was a Year of the Pig.*

Are strikes by the police to be regarded approximately the same way as strikes by ordinary workers? A reading of the treatment accorded to the New York police strike by the Daily World (the paper of the Communist Party which professes to be Marxist-Leninist) clearly conveys this impression. A column by George Morris, the Daily World's labor analyst, waxes eloquent about the cops' strike and says "it is in the spirit of rebellion we see everywhere today as in unions against the long entrenched bureaucracy." He further says that the cops are "beginning to see themselves as in much the same position as other city employees and workers." Finally, he

admonishes his readers that “fire should not be blunderbussed against all on the police force.”

You see, the way to look at it is that there are good cops and bad cops, just like there are good capitalists and bad ones. We must assume then, that there are good storm troopers and bad ones if we use the logic of George Morris. In this way, Morris substitutes bourgeois morality for Marxist analysis of class antagonisms and contradictions between class groupings.

The cops’ strike is not an isolated phenomenon. There is one in progress right now in Milwaukee. Earlier there were strikes or stoppages in Detroit and Youngstown, Ohio. Strike preparations are underway in perhaps a dozen other cities throughout the country. It is therefore necessary and in the vital interests of the working class to restate the fundamental position of revolutionary Marxism on this crucial question. Should strikes of cops be treated on an equal level with workers’ strikes?

Emphatically, no! A striking worker and a striking police officer may on the surface appear to have the same immediate aims — to get higher pay and better conditions for themselves. But this is to take an extremely narrow and superficial view of their apparently similar situations. The truth, however, is that there is objectively speaking not a shred of class identity between workers and the police. The fundamental interests of the workers are diametrically opposed to those of the police and are absolutely irreconcilable with them.

## **Producers or parasites?**

A worker is, above all, a producer. The police officer is a parasite who lives off what the worker produces. No truer words could be said! All the material wealth which is now in the possession of the capitalist class was produced by the workers. When a worker goes out on strike she [or he] is merely trying to retrieve a portion of the wealth which her [or his] labor power produced. The worker gets back in the form of

wages only a portion of what he [or she] produces. The rest is what the capitalist class retains in the form of profit (really the unpaid labor of the workers).

The gross national income of the U.S. last year reached the astronomical sum of one trillion dollars. It was all produced by workers: Black, Brown, white, men and women and even children. The struggles of all the workers, insofar as their immediate demands are concerned, are merely to retrieve a larger portion of this wealth which they produced for the bosses and which the bosses keep for themselves.

### **Contribute nothing to social wealth**

What have the cops contributed to the production of this unprecedented amount of wealth? Nothing at all. In fact, their principal function is to guard the wealth for the capitalists, protect their monopolist profits from the demands of the workers. Even as the New York cops were out on strike, their emergency crews were busily clubbing the heads of striking telephone workers. That's the very essence of a cop: to crack the heads of strikers and practice the most inhuman brutality against the Black, Puerto Rican and Chicano/a communities.

A cop is a mercenary hired by the capitalist class through their agent (the city government) to keep the mass of the workers and the oppressed in complete subjection. They utilize all the forces and violence at their disposal whenever the masses rise up in rebellion against the unendurable conditions imposed by the master class.

The police are the most parasitic social grouping in society. When they work — if that's what it can possibly be called — their labor is directed against the workers and oppressed. Graft, corruption, intimate collaboration with all sorts of underworld figures and enterprises such as gambling, narcotics and a thousand other shady businesses — that's what cops are really engaged in.

They are utterly inseparable from crime and corruption itself. One could not exist without the other. Both are nourished and supported by the nature of the capitalist system itself. To put the police on a par with the workers is to erase the difference between the persecutors and their victims.

Such incidental operations of the police as traffic control and other related useful functions for society are deliberately tacked on by the government to police control when they in reality should be separate and independent activities of workers apart from the parasitic regular police functions.

### **What about German 'Social Democrat' cops?**

The police in every capitalist country are trained in the spirit of civil war against the workers and the popular masses in general. This is so even in the rare cases, like pre-war Austria and Germany, where substantial sections of the police considered themselves "socialists" or "social democrats" because a large section of the populations of these countries were either socialists or communists.

However, at the critical moment when Hitler made ready to seize power by a fascist coup, the police unanimously and cheerfully lined up with him and opened up a civil war against the workers of Austria. In Germany proper, they joined the storm troopers. They played a prime role in Hitler's attempt to ferret out every militant worker and every progressive person and haul them off to the concentration camps. These same police systematically carried out the torture of hundreds of thousands of socialists and communists, not to speak of the unbelievable atrocities against the Jews.

In this country, who does not know that the Klan and the John Birch Society are the most intimate collaborators with the police and in some cities actually control the police?

Who does not know that almost all the strike-breaking agencies in the country work hand in glove with the police? Both are in the service of the industrialists as soon as the workers make an independent move of their own.

### **Army of occupation in oppressed communities**

In the Black and Brown communities, the police play the role of a foreign occupation army and practice a form of cruelty and brutality which differs only in degree from the U.S. occupation army in Vietnam and Cambodia. As a token of the high esteem and affection in which these communities hold the police, they have coined the word "pig" as synonym for cop and this word has passed into the universal language of the oppressed.

It is utterly false to compare the rebellion of the cops with that of the workers and oppressed people, as does Daily World columnist George Morris. Only one who has renounced Marxism would do that.

The police strikes, if they can be called that, are in the nature of pro-slavery rebellions whose ultimate effect is to strengthen the capitalist state against the masses everywhere. A victory for the cops means extra privileges for these parasites. This will embolden them and encourage them in the use of violence in future struggles against the workers. Every cent paid to the police comes out of the hides of the workers. Every cent they get is at the expense of welfare, housing, schools, and other facilities and services that are needed by the people. And the police are now the biggest item in New York City's budget!

Unlike workers, when police go out on strike they are not trying to retrieve money withheld from them for useful work done on behalf of society. Their services are solely and exclusively in the interests of one class of society only: the ruling class. Clarity on this point is absolutely indispensable. If the police find themselves in a controversy with the ruling class over the amount of money they should get as

mercenaries, the workers should treat this as an internal struggle in the camp of the enemy and not confuse it with a struggle of their own class.

But that's exactly what George Morris does! His article is an affront to every worker who has ever felt the brunt of a police club.

## **The Boston police strike of 1919**

Of course, there are exceptional cases where police strikers, in a struggle with the capitalist state, have no alternative but to turn for support to the workers. These cases are rare indeed, such as the Boston police strike of 1919, which Calvin Coolidge, then governor of Massachusetts, broke. In such cases it is the duty of the workers' leaders to adroitly intervene in the struggle.

In doing so, they must make clear that their intervention is not motivated by any class solidarity with the police (who on the morrow of their victory will again proceed to club the heads of striking workers) but out of motives of working-class expedience — that is, to help the police undermine the capitalist state structure. The longer a police strike lasts, the more it undermines capitalist law and order. In that task, a revolutionary worker should help, while helping even more to build workers' self-defense groups.

The various parasitic elements which constitute the capitalist state are always in conflict with each other on how to divide among themselves the juiciest portions of the city, state and federal treasuries. Like thieves, they are invariably at each other's throats, each seeking a greater share of the loot. These parasitic elements comprise the police, detectives, prison officials, executioners, various state and local anti-subversive squads, and the judicial bureaucracies. These are not to be compared to firefighters, sanitation workers or other workers who have been co-opted by the government into the capitalist state apparatus so as to keep their wages in check. These workers perform useful tasks and will continue to do so even in the highest

form of socialist society. Morris deliberately confuses the issue when he compares police to workers.

### **Will there be cops when classes are gone?**

One way for a Marxist to judge whether a specific social group in the present capitalist state setup is parasitic or really performs socially necessary and useful work is to ask whether such groupings would be needed in a socialist system after the abolition of all class rule. Clearly police will not be needed. With the abolition and disappearance of all vestiges of class privilege, the need for a coercive special force, even a workers' militia, becomes superfluous.

However, men and women who work to make a more sanitary social environment and make it free from all sorts of hazards, such as fire, will of course be needed. If even in a socialist society the need for a coercive force such as police continually diminishes as the socialist system develops to a higher and higher form, then all the less do we need police in a capitalist society. Here its fundamental function is to suppress the working class and in particular use the most brutal violence against the Black, Chicano/a and Puerto Rican people.

It is to be noted that the current wave of police insurgency comes after a considerable period when they have been engaged in actual civil war against the Black and Brown communities. The ruling class has felt itself more and more indebted to the police precisely because of this. Having been highly flattered for their brutal role in the recent period, the police are now demanding extra privileges and remuneration for their storm trooper role in those communities and on the college campuses as well as in the recent strike struggles throughout the whole country.

The police have also become more vociferous in denouncing the so-called lenient judges and demanding that the government "take the handcuffs off the police." This

cry is nothing but a fascist demand for the right to unrestricted use of force and violence against the civil population. It is in this context that we must view the police strikes as well as the general historical role that they play in the class struggle.

### **Paris Commune dispelled cops — and crime**

That the working class needs no capitalist police to secure and defend them was never more clearly demonstrated than in the first great proletarian revolution more than a hundred years ago — during the Paris Commune. Scarcely had the Paris Commune been established (the first truly working class government had just begun to survey the tasks ahead of it) when the world had its first vision since the dawn of class society of what would happen to the entire capitalist police establishment on the day of the proletarian revolution.

“No more corpses at the morgue, no nocturnal burglaries, scarcely any robberies,” says Karl Marx about the Paris Commune in his celebrated book, “The Civil War in France.”

“In fact, for the first time since the days of February 1848,” he remarks, “the streets of Paris were safe and without police of any kind.”

Is there a capitalist government anywhere in the world that can make such a boast even for one day? Is there any large city anywhere in the capitalist world which is free even for a single day of any crime and could do without any police of any kind as was the case with the Paris Commune? Merely to ask the question is to answer it. To put an end to crime it is first of all necessary to put an end to the thoroughly criminal rule of the bourgeoisie. It is their very existence which breeds not only crime and corruption but virulent racism, imperialist war and genocide.

To infuse the working class with a revolutionary attitude toward the police is at the same time ideological preparation for the overthrow of the capitalist class.



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# Marxism and insurrection: When the people rebel against racism

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*On Memorial Day 2020, four Minneapolis police brutally murdered George Floyd. Video of the killing quickly spread around the world. On May 26, some 20,000 people marched in Minneapolis, where they were confronted with a violent police response, including rubber bullets and tear gas. The following day, the city erupted into a full-scale rebellion against the racist police. As of this writing, Minnesota's governor has called in the National Guard to help repress the ongoing uprising.*

*This article by Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the 20th century, was written during the Los Angeles rebellion against racism in May 1992, following the acquittal of the cops who beat Black motorist Rodney King. It explains the revolutionary significance and class character of these popular rebellions against racist state violence that the corporate media and politicians seek to cover up.*

The brutal suppression of the Los Angeles insurrection offers a classic example of the relationship of bourgeois democracy to the capitalist state. The statistics most eloquently demonstrate the relationship.

The number of arrests in Los Angeles County alone as of May 5 is 12,111 and still rising. The number of injuries has reached a staggering 2,383. Several hundred are critically wounded. Thus, the number of dead at present will undoubtedly continue to rise.

All this has to be seen in light of the repressive forces amassed by the city, state and federal government: 8,000 police, 9,800 National Guard troops, 1,400 Marines, 1,800 Army soldiers and 1,000 federal marshals. (Associated Press, May 5, 1992)

At the bottom of it all, Marxism differs from all forms of bourgeois sociology in this most fundamental way: all bourgeois social sciences are directed at covering up and concealing — sometimes in the most shameful way — the predatory class character of present-day capitalist society. Marxism, on the other hand, reveals in the clearest and sharpest manner not only the antagonisms that continually rend asunder present-day bourgeois society but also their basis — the ownership of the means of production by a handful of millionaires and billionaires.

Bourgeois sociology must leave out of consideration the fact that society is divided into exploiter and exploited, oppressors of nationalities and oppressed. The basis for both the exploitation and oppression is the ownership of the means of production by an ever-diminishing group of the population that controls the vital arteries of contemporary society. They are the bourgeoisie, the ruling class. At the other end of the axis is the proletariat of all nationalities, the producer of all the fabulous wealth.

Material wealth has been vastly increasing along with the masses' productivity of labor. But only 1 percent of the population amasses the lion's share of what the workers produce while a greater and greater mass is impoverished.

## **Flattering 'the people'**

Especially during periods of parliamentary elections as in the U.S. today, bourgeois sociologists are full of effusive praise for "the people." Each and every capitalist politician embraces "the people" with what often becomes disgusting flattery. The people are everything during periods when the bourgeoisie needs them most of all, as during its many predatory wars. Indeed, at no time is the bourgeoisie so attached to the people as when it is in its deepest crisis.

But the people — the unarmed masses — become nothing, not even human beings, when they are in the full throes of rebellion against the bourgeoisie's monstrous police and military machine. Does not the Los Angeles insurrection prove all this?

No amount of praise, no amount of flattery, can substitute for a clear-cut delineation of the class divisions that perpetually rend society apart.

To the bourgeois social scientists, the masses are the object of history. Marxist theory, on the other hand, demonstrates that the masses are the subject of history. Where they are the objects of history they are manipulated as raw material to suit the aims of ruling-class exploitation. They become the subject of history only when they rise to the surface in mass revolutionary action.

Their rising, as in Los Angeles, is what Karl Marx called the locomotive of history. Their revolutionary struggle accelerates history, bringing to the fore the real character of the mass movement.

To speak of the people in general terms, without cutting through the propaganda to reveal the relations of exploiter to exploited, of oppressor to oppressed, is to participate in covering up the reality.

## **Oppression of a whole people**

Most indispensable for an understanding of contemporary society is the relation between oppressor and oppressed nationalities. One cannot apply Marxism to any meaningful extent without first recognizing the existence of national oppression — the oppression of a whole people by capitalist imperialism. This is one of the most characteristic features of the present world reality.

This concept above all others must be kept foremost if we hope to understand what has happened in Los Angeles and in other major cities of this country.

The insurrection and the way it is being suppressed closely follow the exposition by Frederick Engels in his book ["The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State,"](#) and later brought up to date by Lenin in ["The State and Revolution."](#)

### **What is the state? What is democracy?**

Bourgeois sociologists and scholars and above all capitalist politicians always confound the relationship between the two. They often treat them as a single phenomenon. In reality, the relation between democracy and the state is based on an inner struggle — between form and essence.

The state can take on many different forms. A state can have the form of a bourgeois democracy; it can be a monarchy; it may be ruled by a military junta. And in modern society, on the very edge of the 21st century, it may have a totalitarian or fascist form.

Whatever its form, its essence is determined by which class is dominant economically and consequently also dominant politically. In contemporary society, this means the rule of the imperialist bourgeoisie over the proletariat and the oppressed nationalities.

### **Bourgeoisie needs different forms of rule**

The bourgeoisie cannot maintain its class rule by relying solely on one particular form of the state. It can't rely only on the governing officialdom — even those at the very summit of the state, even when they are solely millionaires and billionaires. Under such circumstances, should there be an imperialist war or a deep capitalist crisis that leads to ferment among the masses, the bourgeois state would be vulnerable to revolutionary overthrow.

But the state is not just the officialdom — who presume to govern in the interest of all the people. The state in its essential characteristics is the organization, to quote Engels, of a “special public force” that consists not merely of armed men and women but of material appendages, prisons and repressive institutions of all kinds.

The decisive basic ingredient of the state is the armed forces with all their material appendages and all who service them. Most noteworthy are the prisons — more and more of them — calculated to break the spirit of millions of the most oppressed while pretending to some mock forms of rehabilitation. All the most modern means — mental and physical — are used to demoralize and deprave the character of those incarcerated.

These repressive institutions, this public force, appears so omnipotent against the unarmed mass of the oppressed and exploited. But it stands out as the very epitome of gentility and humaneness when it comes to incarcerating favored individuals, especially the very rich, who have transgressed the norms of capitalist law.

In general then, the Los Angeles insurrection shows that democracy is a veil that hides the repressive character of the capitalist state. The state at all times is the state of the dominant class. And the objective of the special bodies of armed men and women is to secure, safeguard and uphold the domination of the bourgeoisie.

## **Growth of the state**

Engels explained that in the course of development of capitalist society, as the class antagonisms grow sharper, the state — that is, the public force — grows stronger.

Said Engels, "We have only to look at our present-day Europe where class struggle, rivalry and conquest has screwed up the public power to such a pitch that it threatens to devour the whole of society and even the state itself."

Written more than 100 years ago, this refers to the growth of militarism. The sharpening of class and national antagonisms had even then resulted in larger and larger appropriations for civilian and military personnel employed for the sole purpose of suppressing the civil population at home and waging adventurist imperialist wars abroad.

The state grows in proportion as class and national antagonisms develop. Democracy is merely a form which hides the predatory class character of the bourgeois state. Nothing so much proves this as the steady and consistent growth of militarism and the police forces in times of peace as well as war.

The ruling class continually cultivates racism to keep the working class divided, in order to maintain its domination. This is as true at home as it is abroad. The forces of racism and national oppression have been deliberately stimulated by Pentagon and State Department policies all across the globe.

## **Marxism on violence**

After every stage in the struggle of the workers and oppressed people, there follows an ideological struggle over what methods the masses should embrace to achieve their liberation from imperialist monopoly capital. There are always those who abjure violence while minimizing the initial use of violence by the ruling class. They denounce it in words, while in deeds they really cover it up. That's precisely what's happening now.

Yes indeed, they readily admit the verdict in the Rodney King beating was erroneous and unfair. But — and here their voices grow louder — “The masses should not have taken to the streets and taken matters into their own hands.” Their denunciation of the violence of the ruling class is subdued and muffled — above all it is hypocritical, a sheer formality. It’s an indecent way of seeming to take both sides of the argument when what follows is in reality a condemnation of the masses.

In times when the bourgeoisie is up against the wall, when the masses have risen suddenly and unexpectedly, the bourgeoisie gets most lyrical in abjuring violence. It conjures up all sorts of lies and deceipts about the unruliness of a few among the masses as against the orderly law-abiding many.

Marxism here again cuts through it all. The Marxist view of violence flows from an altogether different concept. It first of all distinguishes between the violence of the oppressors as against the responsive violence of the masses. Just to be able to formulate it that way is a giant step forward, away from disgusting bourgeois praise for nonviolence. It never occurs to any of them to show that the masses have never made any real leap forward with the theory of nonviolence. Timidity never made it in history.

Indeed, Marxists do prefer nonviolent methods if the objectives the masses seek — freedom from oppression and exploitation — can be obtained that way. But Marxism explains the historical evolution of the class struggle as well as the struggle of oppressed nations as against oppressors.

## **Revolutions, force and violence**

As Marx put it, “force is the midwife to every great revolution.” This is what Marx derived from his study of the class struggle in general and of capitalist society in particular.

None of the great revolutions has ever occurred without being accompanied by force and violence. And it is always the oppressor — the ruling class and the oppressing nationality — that is most congenitally prone to use force as soon as the masses raise their heads.

In all the bourgeois revolutions in Europe, this new would-be ruling class used the masses to fight its battles against the feudal lords. Then, when the masses raised their heads to fight for their own liberation against the bourgeoisie, they were met with the most fearful and unmitigated violence. All European history is filled with such examples, from the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 to the Paris Commune of 1871. Does not the bourgeoisie, once it has tamed the proletariat at home, use force and violence through its vast military armada to more efficiently exploit and suppress the many underdeveloped nations throughout the world?

It is so illuminating that Iraq, the nation subjected to the most violent, truly genocidal military attack in recent times, has taken upon itself to press a formal complaint in the United Nations Security Council on behalf of the embattled masses in Los Angeles and other cities. Iraq called on that body to condemn and investigate the nature of the developments here and the irony is that the head of the Security Council felt obligated to accept the complaint. Not even the U.S. delegate, obviously taken by surprise, objected.

How much real difference is there between the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 and that of the revolutionary rising of the masses in Los Angeles in 1992? The brutal suppression differs only in magnitude and not in essence. While it might seem that in Los Angeles national oppression alone is involved, in reality it derives from the class exploitation of the African American masses dating back to the days of slavery.

## **Watts and social legislation**

Following the Watts insurrection, the bourgeoisie made lofty promises to improve the situation. The Watts, Detroit, Newark and other rebellions did win significant concessions that eventually were enacted into law. They became the basis for a temporary improvement in the economic and social situation of the oppressed people.

None of the progressive legislation, up to and including affirmative action, would have been enacted had it not been for the rebellions during the 1960s and the 1970s. Yet now, almost three decades after the Watts rebellion, the masses are in greater poverty and the repression is heavier than before. The fruits of what was won have withered on the vine as racism and the deterioration of economic conditions took hold once again.

Once more the bourgeois politicians attempted to mollify the masses with endless promises of improvements never destined to see the light of day. This evoked a profound revulsion among the masses. It took only an incident like the incredible verdict of the rigged jury that freed the four police officers in the Rodney King beating to ignite a storm of revolutionary protest.

If revolutionary measures are ever to have any validity, doesn't a case like this justify the people taking destiny into their own hands?

### **Less workers, more cops**

How interesting that technology everywhere displaces labor, reducing the number of personnel.

There was a time when it was hoped that the mere development of technical and industrial progress, the increase in mechanization and automation, would contribute to the well-being of the masses. This has once again shown itself to be a hollow mockery. The truth is that the development of higher and more sophisticated

technology under capitalism doesn't contribute to the welfare of the masses but on the contrary, throws them into greater misery.

What has been the general trend? The growth of technology, particularly sophisticated high technology, has reduced the number of workers employed in industry as well as in the services. The introduction of labor-saving devices and methods has dramatically reduced the number of workers in all fields.

But the opposite trend prevails in the police forces. This is an absolutely incontestable fact. At one time the police patrolled the streets on foot. Maybe they used a public telephone for communications with headquarters. Today they are equipped with sophisticated gear. They ride either on motorcycles or in police cars or helicopters. They communicate by radio.

All this should reduce the number of police. But the trend is quite the contrary: to increase the forces of repression. This is not geared to productivity as in industry. Their growth is geared to the growth of national antagonisms, the growth of racism and the bourgeoisie's general anti-labor offensive.

In Los Angeles, the bourgeoisie is forced to bring in federal troops to assist city and state authorities. The social composition of the U.S. Army is not just a cross-section of capitalist society. The Army and Marines, especially the infantry, have a preponderance of Black and Latinx soldiers. What does this signify?

The U.S. imperialists had to wage a technological war against Iraq out of fear that the preponderance of Black and Latinx soldiers could end up in a disastrous rebellion; they might refuse to engage in a war against their sisters and brothers in the interests of the class enemy. That's why the armed forces never really got into the ground war that seemed at first to be in the offing.

In Los Angeles, the local police and state forces were inadequate. Only because the

masses were unarmed was the bourgeoisie able to suppress what was in truth an insurrection — a revolutionary uprising.

### **Spontaneity and consciousness**

As Marx would put it, such a rising is a festival of the masses. The incidental harm is far outweighed by the fact that it raises the level of the struggle to a higher plateau. The wounds inflicted by the gendarmerie will be healed. The lessons will be learned: that a spontaneous uprising has to be supported with whatever means are available; that a great divide exists between the leaders and the masses.

No viable class or nation in modern capitalist society can hope to take destiny in its own hands by spontaneous struggles alone. Spontaneity as an element of social struggle must beget its own opposite: leadership and organization. Consciousness of this will inevitably grow.



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## **Lenin's 'Imperialism': A weapon for**

# the working class

written by Struggle - La Lucha

July 28, 2021

*From a talk given on Sept. 2, 1993, introducing a series of classes on basic Marxist concepts after the destruction of the Soviet Union.*

We're looking into the arsenal of weapons in the struggle against the imperialist bourgeoisie. We will inspect the weapons from the viewpoint of their readiness in the forthcoming class struggle of the working class and the oppressed people against capitalism and imperialism.

Right after the first imperialist world war started in 1914, and the carnage of workers began, a number of anti-war groups called a meeting in a neutral country. I think it was Lenin who said the important thing wasn't how many came, but that they came to the meeting. And having come, they considered what to do.

In a large measure, this is what we have to do. The Marxist movement has suffered an August 4, 1914, catastrophe. But we are in a position to recuperate and regenerate the movement. And in no other place on earth is the situation more favorable, objectively and historically, than right here. This audience must not underestimate it.

## Why study Marxism?

Why do we need to go over Marxism? Why can't we just assign comrades to read this and that and then go on to the business of the war in Nicaragua, or what's going on in the imperialist attacks on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or what's happening with the Palestinians?

We have to have a basic evaluation of what is going on. An examination of our

ideological weapons. Which ones are more useful. Which are most likely to be used in the near future. Which are to be held for a later date.

The bourgeoisie regard their system as eternal, not subject to fundamental change. This differs radically from Marxism, which teaches us that capitalism is a transitory social formation. Like feudalism and slavery, it will have to give way to a higher form of society.

The bourgeoisie cannot give an objective assessment of the real trends in capitalist society. Everything they do is calculated to serve self-interest of the most venomous type, which goes along with imperialist brigandage all over the globe.

Our purpose in reviewing Marxism is to prepare us for the storms and stresses of the next period. We have every confidence that Marx's prediction of a revolutionary storm will come true. We need to re-examine our basic armor with a view to its operational effectiveness. That is what our study is about. We will go from the abstract to the concrete this time around.

We don't need a scholastic, pedantic recitation. We need a critical review, not from the viewpoint of revisionism and renunciation but from the viewpoint of reinforcing and strengthening the heritage that has been bequeathed to us by the great leaders of the past.

In this short session we will look at the latest phase of capitalism, which Lenin called imperialism. Many decades ago, he wrote the pamphlet "[Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.](#)" I'm sure you're all acquainted with it. Every one of us is duty bound to read and study it.

### **Lenin's five characteristics of imperialism**

There are at least five characteristics of imperialism that Lenin thought important in characterizing this stage of capitalism. And they are still true some 77 years later.

He first of all mentioned the concentration of production, of capital, the development of competition into monopoly. How does it happen? What is the interplay between monopoly and competition? One doesn't replace the other. They both exist. How is it different today from Lenin's period?

The bourgeoisie is always discussing competition and monopoly. There are thousands of cases in the courts that deal with monopoly and competition from the point of view of their problems. On the one hand, they want to restrain monopoly, yet they also want to strengthen it. They've had two world wars and another one could be coming. How do you restrain and foster monopoly at the same time? It's a dual process.

Lenin tells us about the merging of bank capital with industrial capital and the creation of finance capital.

Then there is the export of capital which has become extremely important as distinguished from the export of commodities. The U.S. exports not just commodities but loans all over the world. That's got to be studied. How important is this difference?

Lenin also writes about the formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves.

General Electric, Westinghouse, and one or two Japanese companies share their market on a world basis. But it's not a stable agreement. They establish arbitrators and courts of arbitration to issue awards and all that, but they don't keep the agreements, basically because they are thieves and pirates. It's utopian to expect them to have gentlemen's agreements among themselves, especially when billions of dollars are at stake.

## **Redivision of the world**

According to Lenin, the world was already shared out among the great capitalist powers when he wrote “Imperialism” in 1916. The wars since have invalidated a lot of this. Some imperialist countries have become stronger and others weaker. Japan has become stronger. Britain, Holland, Belgium, and others have become weaker. What has taken their place, of course, is U.S. imperialism. It attempts to take over everything that is not nailed down.

A fundamental feature of imperialism is also the fusion of the capitalist state with the banks and industry. The industrialists carry on a struggle to maintain some form of independence among themselves as against the finance capitalists, but this independence is overturned and giant financial and industrial corporations get fused. This doesn't solve the contradiction, but brings it within a certain area of agreement.

### **Henry Ford and finance capital**

Let me give you an example of what Lenin means about the fusion of industry with finance capital. Henry Ford and his empire existed for a considerable period as a family unit. No banks, no insurance companies owned the Ford company. It all belonged to one family.

He was so fearful that Wall Street, meaning the bankers, would take it over that he launched an anti-Semitic campaign. He subsidized two or three publications of an anti-Semitic character in order to chastise and expose Wall Street.

What was the real problem? He didn't want his industrial empire to succumb to finance capital. He wanted it to stay in the family.

From the Leninist conception of imperialism, this meant that Ford, as an industrialist, was attempting to ward off the fusion of finance capital with his industrial empire. In the end, he and his son capitulated. They made it a

stockholding company where everybody could buy the stock. The Wall Street firms that sell and float stocks, that lend and borrow money, made it like any other corporation — General Motors, Chrysler, IBM and so on.

It showed how it's not possible to be an independent entity in the imperialist epoch. Least of all, you can't keep the banks out unless you want to lose money. Ultimately, Ford capitulated to the financiers because he would have lost the competitive edge if he tried to stay independent.

### **The Thinking Machine Corp.**

I would like to give you a more modern example. There's a company called The Thinking Machine Corp. It develops very sophisticated, advanced computer technology. It's not one of the Fortune 500 companies, but it does sell computers around the world, to the tune of \$100 million.

Recently, this little company with about 500 workers was going through a shakeup in the leadership — all of whom were experts in high technology. They decided they wanted a new chief executive from the outside. Sometimes, when an organization can't function because of disagreements among themselves, it's best to get somebody from the outside.

So what did they do? They got somebody named Harold Fishman, a lawyer in the biggest corporate law firm in the U.S., and asked him to become the head of The Thinking Machine.

If they wanted somebody from the outside, why in the world pick a Wall Street lawyer who doesn't know anything about technology? How is he going to run the corporation? The question was asked publicly. Why go to Wall Street? He is very brilliant. He's got all the qualities that a lawyer and a corporate manager should have. But he is not a technology leader. So why get him?

IBM had laid off a lot of technology-wise executives. So had others. A great pool of talent is unemployed. Why go to Wall Street to hire Fishman?

It indicates that financial interests, marketing and the business of gains and losses take precedence over the needs of technological developments.

There's a socialist principle involved in this. In a socialist U.S., production would be regulated by the workers in the interest of production for use. If this were a project in a socialist country, it might be necessary to call somebody in to settle the differences. But it wouldn't be a corporate lawyer. It would be another technology leader.

For a while, it was progressive for industrial capitalism to gain advantages in the marketplace through the financiers. That financed the industrial base and helped it grow. But having established that, it strengthened parasitism.

It's important for us to understand the inner workings, the mechanism of the relationship between imperialist industry and imperialist finance. And if this is not an example of the decay of imperialism, then I don't know what is.

This example of The Thinking Machine also illustrates the fusion of the capitalist state with industry and finance, because they wouldn't be able to sell many supercomputers around the world unless the vast army of U.S. officials were helpful in beating the competition.

### **Fusion of finance capital and the state**

There's still another aspect of imperialism that I should mention. Among the five characteristics that we have, this one is helpful in understanding a number of the others.

The capitalist state as we know it has three arms — the executive, the legislative and

the judicial. The legislative is the most popular and has the power of the purse.

The ruling class has always been fearful of a popularly elected body, especially after the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

But if you hand the members of Congress the budget of the United States, or a bill on how to sell bananas or computers, you'll pretty soon see that your congressperson may not know much.

The ruling class has established a stratum of extra-governmental, extra-state personnel who make up an unofficial political arm of the capitalist state. They are called lobbyists. They are a power over and above the elected representatives.

If I ask my congressperson about how to get into the sugar business, they'll tell me to come back after they've looked into it. But if I were a big bourgeois in business, I wouldn't go to the congressperson. I would go to the lobbyist. The lobbyist has all the bills about sugar. As soon as the first one comes off the printing press, the lobbyist already has it.

If you need an interpretation, the lobbyist has it. If you ask which congressperson voted for what, they'll tell you that, too. And furthermore, they work day and night and are omnipresent in Washington, in some of the most fashionable and richest houses.

Lobbying has erected a governmental apparatus over and above the Congress that has grown stronger and stronger in the epoch of imperialism. It's an extra-legal apparatus to circumvent the legislative process as outlined in the Constitution.

For that reason, Leninists have always regarded suffrage and popular elections as merely a method of mobilizing the masses, of trying to educate the masses. But not really of accomplishing anything.



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# The Communist Manifesto: A clarion call full of ideas

written by Struggle - La Lucha  
July 28, 2021

*The Communist Manifesto was first published on Feb. 21, 1848. This appreciation was written on its 135th anniversary in 1983 by Sam Marcy, a leading Marxist thinker and fighter of the second half of the twentieth century.*

Of all the great classics in the treasury of Marxism, [The Communist Manifesto](#) unquestionably stands out as the most popular and widely read throughout the world. Bourgeois ideologists, even the most virulent opponents of Marxism, never fail to be astonished by the persistent attraction the Manifesto has for each new generation of revolutionary militants.

The Manifesto, written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in 1848, is a creative revolutionary synthesis of propaganda and agitation, as these terms were originally

defined by George Plekhanov when he was still a revolutionary Marxist.

“Propaganda” was then understood as the presentation of many complex ideas to a small group of people, while “agitation” was conceived as the presentation of a few ideas or a single idea to a large audience. Of course, there’s no wall between the two.

The Manifesto illuminates a great number of complex ideas.

It presents the materialist conception of history in clear, brilliant language. It traces the history of the class struggle from its earliest days to 1848. It analyzes the rise of the bourgeoisie, explains its revolutionary role — and not only analyzes the intermediate classes in bourgeois society, but also mercilessly exposes the nature of capitalist exploitation and oppression as it had never been done before.

The Manifesto’s diagnosis of capitalist society is at the same time a prognosis of the destruction of capitalism at the hands of what the Manifesto calls the “gravediggers” of capitalism — the revolutionary proletariat.

### **Not just a critique but a guide to action**

Far from being merely a criticism of feudal and bourgeois society, the Manifesto thus unequivocally points the way to the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, the Manifesto subjects to critical analysis the nature of the capitalist state, as well as the role of the family, religion and culture.

Above all, in tracing the development of the proletariat from its earliest days in mere handicraft production to its role in large-scale industry by 1848, the Manifesto points to the “proletariat alone as the really revolutionary class” and the historic agent for constituting a new social order, free of exploitation or oppression.

All of this is propaganda — irreplaceable working-class propaganda. Yet at the same time it is also revolutionary agitation of the highest order. It fans the flames of revolution.

On the one hand, the Manifesto directs itself toward presenting a succinct, coherent and lucid exposition of the basic principles of Marxism. To that extent, it directs itself to “the few” — not necessarily the middle class, but the advanced sections of the working class.

On the other hand, with its ringing call to overthrow the oppressors and exploiters, the Manifesto addresses itself directly to the broadest and widest sections of the working class.

It is this dialectical unity of opposites — propaganda and agitation — so skillfully blended together that makes the Manifesto such a monumental achievement.

Nothing could be a more crystal-clear call to the proletariat than the final paragraph of the Manifesto.

It ends with this ringing call to action:

“Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

“Workers of all countries, unite!”

Such a mighty clarion call for revolutionary worldwide action by the proletariat has yet to be surpassed.

Marx and Engels were not unaware that the working class was a narrow segment of

society at the time the Manifesto was written. As Engels said in the 1890 preface to a Polish edition of the Manifesto, “Few voices responded to Workers of all countries, unite!” when we proclaimed these words to the world ... on the eve of the first Paris revolution in which the proletariat came out with demands of its own.”

However, wrote Engels, “On Sept. 28, 1864, the proletarians of most of the Western European countries joined hands in the International Workingmen’s Association.” And even though that International — the first attempt at a world organization of the proletariat — lasted only a few years, said Engels, it left a glorious heritage.

### **National chauvinism vs. internationalism**

Just prior to the start of World War I, the working-class movement in Europe, under the leadership of the Social Democratic parties, reached the zenith of its authority over the broadest masses on the continent. Immediately after the outbreak of the war, however, the movement was virtually smashed as a result of the betrayal by the Social Democratic leadership.

The adherents of revolutionary Marxism — in reality the adherents of the principles enunciated by the Manifesto — were temporarily reduced to a small minority. The majority had succumbed to chauvinism. They had forgotten one of the principal tenets in the Manifesto: that the workers in a capitalist country have no fatherland. “The workers have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.”

The Social Democratic leaders’ surrender to chauvinism cost the proletariat dearly in World War I: millions upon millions of lives lost and untold devastation and destruction.

Nothing so much arouses the prejudices of the bourgeois ideologists, nothing so much enrages them and exposes their deep-seated chauvinism, as the question of “patriotism,” the “defense of the national interest.” Today, more than ever, this

invariably means the defense of the capitalist state and giant finance capital.

Any lie, any falsification will do to corrupt, vulgarize and distort the real meaning and significance of the defense of one's country, as it was understood both in Marx's time and in the imperialist epoch.

Marx and Engels had written extensively about the autonomy and unity of each nation. It is well known that they had fought for the independence of Poland, Hungary, Ireland and Italy. Engels wrote in 1893 in a preface to the Italian edition of the Manifesto that the defeat of the 1848 revolutions resulted in "the fruits of the revolution being reaped by the capitalist class."

"Through the impetus given to large-scale industry in all countries," he wrote, "the bourgeois regime during the last 45 years has everywhere created a numerous, concentrated and powerful proletariat. It has thus raised, to use the language of the Manifesto, its own grave-diggers."

Engels then added this remarkable thought, as pertinent today as it was then: "Without restoring autonomy and unity to each nation, it will be impossible to achieve the international union of the proletariat, or the peaceful and intelligent cooperation of these nations toward common aims."

### **Fighting monopoly capitalism today**

The progressive epoch of the bourgeoisie in the struggle against feudalism — especially the period when Marx was writing — demonstrated a trend toward diminishing national differences and antagonisms. It was due to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market.

The subsequent evolution into monopoly capitalism diverted this trend. Indeed, capitalism has not been able to carry out a single one of its economic trends to its ultimate conclusion.

The classical example of this is the failure of the various trusts and combinations, through the process of competition, to be converted into total monopoly and become a worldwide trust or “super imperialism,” which Karl Kautsky thought would abolish the anarchy of capitalism.

As industrial and technological development grows by leaps and bounds, monopoly capitalism, rather than narrowing national differences and ameliorating national oppression, exacerbates them. It is no wonder that the bourgeois world is literally divided into oppressing and oppressed nations.

But this does not at all disqualify the class struggle. It merely imparts a greater urgency for the revolutionary cooperation and solidarity of all the workers in both the oppressing and oppressed nations — in a common struggle against imperialism, capitalism and all forms of bourgeois reaction and feudal rubbish left by centuries of oppression.

The revolutionary contribution of the bourgeoisie, as Marx explained, was in developing the world market, which has “given a cosmopolitan character to production.” This has greatly increased the strategic role of the working class in production and in relation to the class struggle.

Marx’s words are even more true today: “In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency,” the bourgeoisie has tremendously enhanced “intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations.”

The bourgeoisie cannot create even the semblance of world unity, despite the obvious foundations laid by the gargantuan growth of the productive forces and the ensuing economic interdependence.

Only the proletariat in alliance with the oppressed peoples and the socialist countries can lay the political and social foundations for worldwide solidarity. This is

precisely because only socialism, which is based on planning and the common ownership of the means of production, can purge the worldwide market of its imperialist chaos, its unpredictable crises, and the reign of the arbitrary based on superprofits.

Indeed, the world market, as Marx said, “makes national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible.” It inevitably generates proletarian class solidarity — the truest basis for bringing about the solidarity of the human race.

