

Imperialist Warmongers Strike Again

Down With Bombing of Syria! U.S. Out of the Near East!

On September 23, President Obama initiated air strikes supposedly designed to surgically excise the cancer of ISIS from the areas it occupies in Syria. In a shift of opinion spurred by the filmed

beheadings of American newsmen by ISIS, a majority in this country now supports such strikes, although widespread opposition to a boots-on-the-ground military intervention still exists. As pro-

jected by Obama, the “surgery” will take several years, and with 1,600 or so U.S. troops now in Iraq it is all but assured that many more will follow. Many have pointed out that Obama’s

war rationale mimics George W. Bush’s invocation of the evil Saddam Hussein as the justification for the U.S. occupation of Iraq. U.S. wars fought in the name of combating terror have had as their result hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghani corpses and the proliferation of torture centers like Abu Ghraib. The Obama White House has expanded the field of murderous U.S. forays through drone and missile strikes from Somalia and Yemen to Pakistan, promising many more victims with the intervention into Syria.

U.S. interventions have shredded the social fabric of much of the Near
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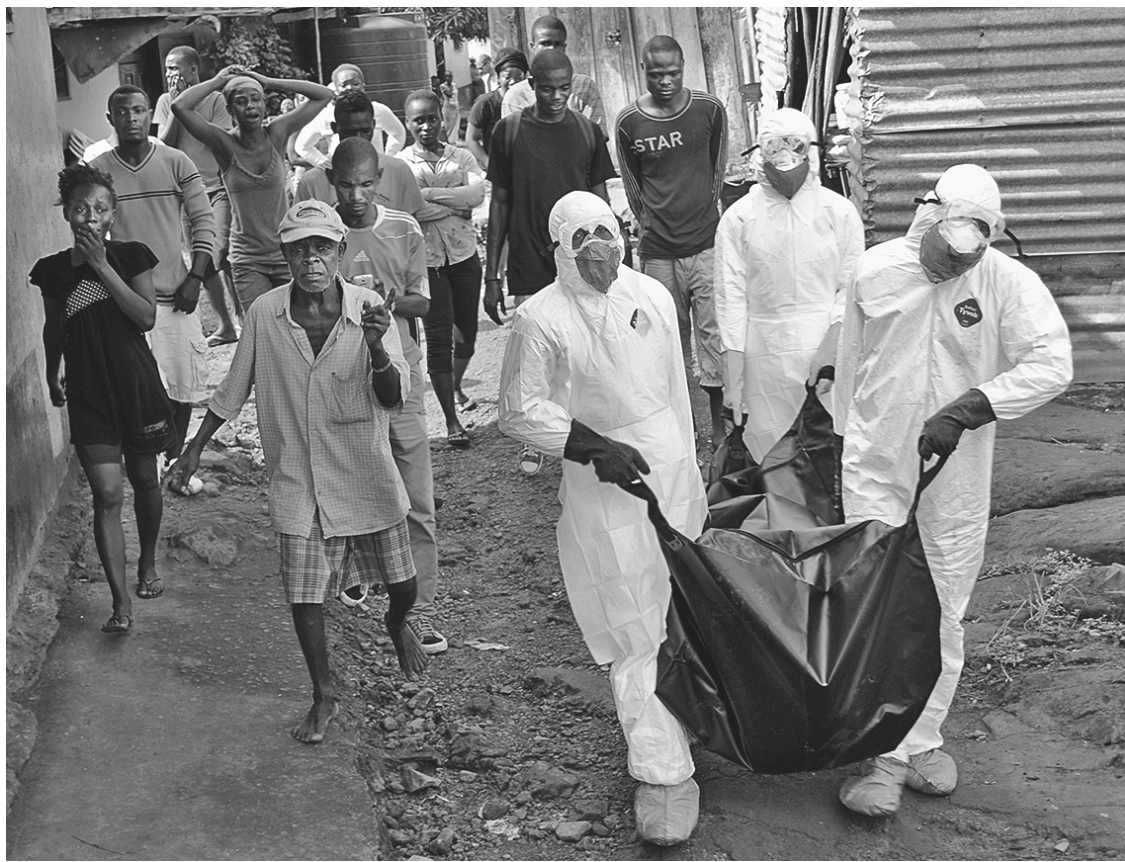
U.S. Troops Out of Liberia!

The Ebola Crisis and the Imperialist Rape of Africa

SEPTEMBER 29—The deadliest Ebola outbreak in history is ravaging the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, spreading rapidly as the number of infections doubles every two to three weeks. Since the outbreak was first reported in March, the official count of those infected is over 6,000 as we go to press, with around half of those cases resulting in death. Those numbers are a vast underestimation, particularly given the remoteness of many of the affected areas and non-systematic reporting. Infection clusters have been detected in Nigeria and Senegal. Scientists project that up to 1.4 million people could be infected by early next year, with the potential for the disease to become a permanent feature of life in West Africa.

Spurring the exponential spread of Ebola are the misery, poverty and entrenched backwardness that are the legacy of colonial rule and imperialist pillage. Looted by the Western capitalist powers, the affected countries are largely rural, with scant technology and infrastructure, limited education and skeletal health care systems. The few health workers in the region have been fighting heroically, short of equipment, facilities and medicine and with little to no access to electricity and clean water. Hundreds of health care providers, including many volunteers, have contracted the virus.

After contemptuously ignoring pleas for medical aid and personnel for months, in mid September President Obama an-



Reuters

September 11: Health workers in Monrovia, Liberia, remove body of Ebola victim.

nounced the deployment of 3,000 U.S. troops to Liberia. There is a sinister reality behind Washington’s professed change of heart. Presenting Ebola as a global security threat, Obama made clear his motivation for intervening militarily: to curb the political and economic “ripple effects” that the spread of the virus could have on the region and beyond. His calling Ebola a “national security priority” is a declaration of U.S. intent to limit the epidemic to Africans and not let it reach American shores.

The profoundly cynical pledge to combat Ebola came packaged with \$750 million to set up a military command center and construct medical treatment facilities. But military spokesmen admit that the treatment centers will not be up and running for months. Meanwhile, the “staging

area” being set up in Senegal to train aid providers and distribute supplies assumes that there actually are personnel to train and that the necessary food, water and goods exist and can actually reach people. Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby announced that the U.S. is committed to a military mission for a minimum of six

months in which troops will not “come into contact with patients.”

In stark contrast to the U.S. imperialists, the Cuban and Chinese deformed workers states have responded generously with crucially needed aid. Cuba is dispatching 461 physicians, epidemiologists and other health professionals. China, which has close to 20,000 citizens working and living in the three most affected countries, is contributing millions in financial aid and increasing the number of its medical personnel in Sierra Leone. What the U.S. is offering is troops, i.e., further terror.

Washington has set up its Ebola command headquarters in its most servile African client state, Liberia, much to the relief of the country’s president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. A U.S. toady, Sirleaf has faced increasing strife and political opposition, especially after imposing a nationwide curfew and sending troops to cordon off the densely populated slum of West Point in the capital, Monrovia. As angry residents tried to break out in search of food, they were met with soldiers’ bullets that killed a 15-year-old boy. Liberia is still reeling from 14 years of civil war, ending in 2003, in which a quarter of a million people were killed. The already impoverished country was left in ruins, with a population bitterly divided and heavily armed.

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Thomas Piketty’s *Capital* in the Twenty-First Century

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Court Orders More Prison Time for Jose Padilla

On September 9, U.S. district judge Marcia Cooke resentenced Jose Padilla to 21 years in prison. Padilla was the victim of a 2007 show trial in which he was railroaded to prison on flimsy “terrorist” conspiracy charges, having already suffered nearly four years of detention as an “unlawful enemy combatant.” Following the trial, Cooke sentenced Padilla to 17 years behind bars. “Too lenient,” cried the Feds, who appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit. In 2011, that court sent the case back to Cooke for harsher sentencing. Bowing to the higher court’s order, Cooke *added* the time he had been detained without charges, extending his release date to some time in 2026—if ever.

A U.S. citizen who had converted to Islam, Padilla was effectively stripped of his citizenship rights in the name of the “war on terror.” He was arrested at Chicago’s O’Hare airport in May 2002 as a “material witness” in a September 11 grand jury investigation. Weeks later, Padilla was accused of planning to set off a “radioactive bomb” and disappeared into a Navy brig in South Carolina. There he was subjected to extreme sensory deprivation, hooded and forced to stand in stress positions for long periods of time, drugged, deprived of sleep and threatened

“Anti-Terror” Show Trial Victim

with imminent execution. While undergoing this torture, Padilla was forbidden to meet with his family and, for almost two years, had no access to lawyers.

In the lead-up to the resentencing, the Justice Department extorted a promise by Padilla’s lawyers not to introduce in the court proceedings any records of his years of torture. In return, the government agreed not to seek a life sentence, promising to ask for no more than a 30-year hit. Nevertheless, the government has announced that it may appeal the latest sentence yet again.

Padilla’s case is of vital importance because it exemplifies the government’s insistence that when the “war on terror” is invoked, basic rights of U.S. citizenship go by the wayside. By those lights, anyone labeled a terror threat can simply be disappeared. What this ultimately means was seen in the case of Islamic cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, a U.S. citizen blown away in a 2011 drone missile attack in Yemen on orders from the Obama White House. So much for the supposed constitutional

right to confront and answer allegations against the accused. In Padilla’s case, when the government finally moved him from military to civilian custody in 2005 and filed ludicrous “conspiracy” charges against him, it was to head off an anticipated Supreme Court decision ordering his release. In this way, the Bush White House sought to preserve the legal precedent giving the government the right to declare U.S. citizens “enemy combatants” and to lock them up indefinitely.

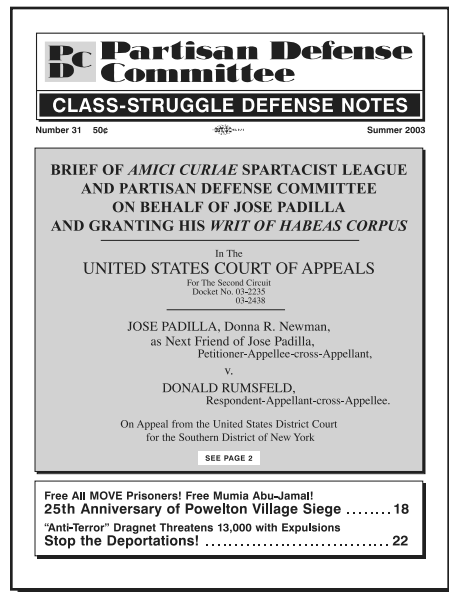
The conspiracy indictment of Padilla made no mention of the chimerical “radioactive bomb” or any single specific terrorist attack or plot, in the U.S. or anywhere else. Instead, Padilla and co-defendants Adham Hassoun and Kifah Jayyousi were accused of conspiracy to support “violent jihad” around the world by raising money for Islamic charities or traveling abroad. In the words of the federal prosecutor, the accusations involved an “inchoate crime” rather than a “completed operation.” In plain English, Padilla’s “crime” was to harbor animosity towards the U.S. imperialists, the greatest force for terror on the planet.

From the beginning, the persecution of Padilla represented an escalation in the attacks on basic civil liberties—the right to counsel and trial, the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment—that are at the core of the “war on terrorism.” Employed in the first instance against immigrants and others caught up in the terror scare, the enhancement of the government’s repressive arsenal will be used to suppress the struggles of black people, other oppressed sectors and the multiracial working class, the only force with the social power to sweep away capitalist rule.

In 2002 and 2003, the Spartacist League and the Partisan Defense Committee submitted *amici curiae* briefs in Padilla’s

defense, challenging his detention without charges as a fundamental attack on the rights of citizenship and due process supposedly guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We stated:

“The case of Jose Padilla tests the very existence of the fundamental rights of due process—liberty of the individual from the arbitrary, discriminatory power of the state—and the freedoms protected by the First Amendment. It poses the evisceration of the rights and privileges of citizenship embodied in the first ten Amendments to the Constitution and



Spartacist League/PDC 2003 *amici curiae* brief on behalf of Jose Padilla can be obtained for \$.50. Order from/pay to: PDC, P.O. Box 99, Canal St. Station, New York, NY 10013.

secured on the battlefield of the Civil War and in class and social struggle over the past hundred and more years. If the imperial President is upheld, Padilla’s detention threatens to become the Dred Scott case of our time, a declaration that ‘Citizens have no rights that the government is bound to respect.’”

It is in the interests of all workers, minorities and defenders of civil liberties to demand an end to the persecution of Jose Padilla. Free him now! ■

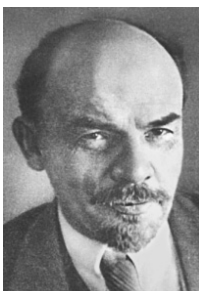


TROTSKY

Socialism and Rational Economic Development

Nearly 140 years ago, Friedrich Engels, cofounder with Karl Marx of scientific socialism, explained that it will take the revolutionary overturn of the anarchic capitalist system for mankind to finally exert conscious control over economic life.

The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the



LENIN

forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. When the Italians of the Alps used up the pine forests on the southern slopes, so carefully cherished on the northern slopes, they had no inkling that by doing so they were cutting at the roots of the dairy industry in their region; they had still less inkling that they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, and making it possible for them to pour still more furious torrents on the plains during the rainy seasons....

It required the labour of thousands of years for us to learn a little of how to calculate the more remote *natural* effects of our actions in the field of production, but it has been still more difficult in regard to the more remote *social* effects of these actions.... The men who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries laboured to create the steam-engine had no idea that they were preparing the instrument which more than any other was to revolutionise social relations throughout the world. Especially in Europe, by concentrating wealth in the hands of a minority and dispossessing the huge majority, this instrument was destined at first to give social and political domination to the bourgeoisie, but later, to give rise to a class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat which can end only in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of all class antagonisms.—But in this sphere too, by long and often cruel experience and by collecting and analysing historical material, we are gradually learning to get a clear view of the indirect, more remote social effects of our production activity, and so are afforded an opportunity to control and regulate these effects as well.

This regulation, however, requires something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and simultaneously a revolution in our whole contemporary social order.

—Friedrich Engels, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man” (1876)

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The Poverty of Bourgeois Economics

Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*

By Gerrit Bogle and
Joseph Seymour

Part One

Fewer full-time jobs, low wages and permanent indebtedness have working people in the U.S. scrambling to make ends meet. From 2010 to 2013, the period of economic “recovery” from the so-called Great Recession, median family incomes plummeted another 5 percent. So fragile is the economic position of the working and poor masses that an unexpected car problem or medical issue can spell disaster. Meanwhile, sky-high corporate profits, the stock market boom and a rebound in house prices have further concentrated wealth in the hands of the filthy rich.

Widespread anger over these savage disparities found an outlet a few years ago in the Occupy protests that began in New York City and spread across the country. Well aware that it is fuel that could light the tinder of class struggle, the capitalist rulers have given some lip service to curtailing income inequality. President Obama declared last December that such inequality was “a fundamental threat to the American Dream, our way of life, and what we stand for around the globe.” This from a White House that oversaw the massive bailout of the banks and auto bosses, while leaving millions jobless and destitute. Around the globe, what Washington stands for can be measured in the rubble and carnage left in the wake of U.S. military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

The issue of the income gap has come to feature more in debates over the U.S. economy, with radical liberals and die-hard establishment ideologues alike expressing concern that the gulf is too wide for the overall health of the system. Enter Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, published in English this spring. Piketty, a French economist who had collaborated on work that inspired the Occupy slogan “we are the 99 percent,” was immediately hailed for putting numbers to the evolution of inequality in modern capitalist society.

An article in the London *Guardian* (12 April) on Piketty proclaimed: “Occupy was right.” Kathleen Geier, writing for the liberal magazine *The Baffler*, called his book a “truth bomb.” Reformist socialists, too, have effused over elements of the book, even as they raise some criticisms.

A Marxist Review

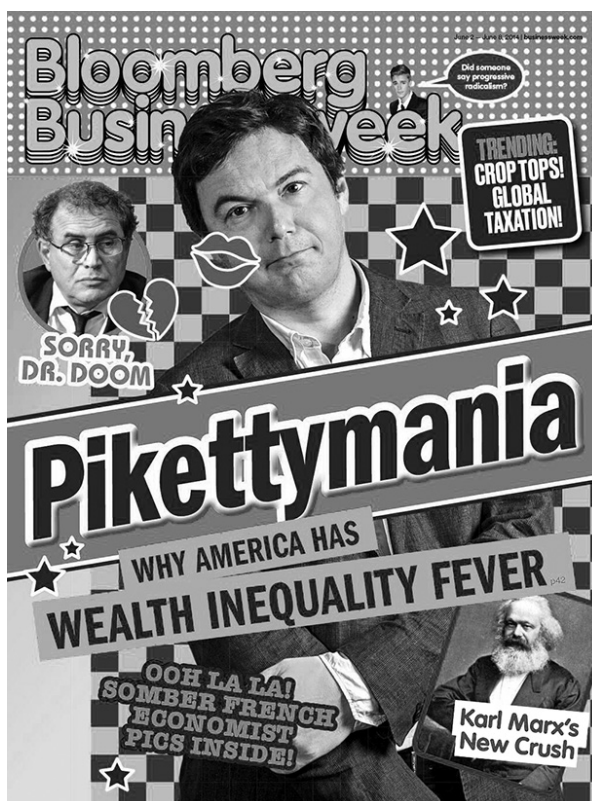
Socialist Alternative, while noting Piketty's “big weaknesses,” has gushed that he “deals with inequality, attacks aspects of capitalism, and puts forward the need for more sharing of the wealth.” Similarly, the International Socialist Organization praises the author for refuting “the idea that capitalism spreads the wealth while protecting individual liberties.”

Accolades have also poured in from other quarters. Larry Summers, Bill Clinton's treasury secretary, former Harvard president and notorious derivatives deregulator, offered that Piketty had made a “profoundly important contribution” by “focusing attention on what has happened to a fortunate few among us.” *Bloomberg Businessweek* (2 June) went so far as to make Piketty its “cover stud,” with the glowing profile inside penned by one Megan McArdle, a right-wing libertarian flack long tied to the union-hating Koch brothers. Certainly, some mouthpieces for finance capital, such as the *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, tried to discredit Piketty's calculations. However, this campaign didn't get very far since the likes of Summers and the editorial staff at the *London Economist* are in Piketty's corner.

Piketty's one policy recommendation is a global wealth tax, an idea that even his biggest boosters have a hard time taking seriously. It is at once ridiculously modest and utterly utopian on a worldwide scale. In fact, he admits the scheme is utopian, only to argue that “it is perfectly possible to move toward this ideal solution step by step.” His native country, France, has had a wealth tax for decades. Large numbers of the country's most well-heeled families (and celebrities like actor Gérard Depardieu) have simply picked up and moved as France's neighbors roll out the red carpet.

Herein lies the fundamental flaw in Piketty's proposal: a capitalist government, charged with protecting the “national interest,” is naturally loath to adopt a measure

that risks competitive disadvantage for the ruling class it serves. And the imperialist nation-states are driven to compete with each other, as the barbarism of two world wars shows. Even the European Union, which promotes itself as a democratic consortium of equal partners, is actually an instrument for the dominant powers, Germany and Piketty's France, to prey upon the weaker countries.



Cover of *Bloomberg Businessweek* (2 June).

Absent the wealth tax, the reader is left with a series of figures—some useful (particularly the data on rising inequality), many not—and a rather half-baked account of the history of economic development. Then there is the conclusion, which was better articulated in Doris Day's 1953 version of “Ain't We Got Fun”: “There's nothing surer: the rich get rich and the poor get poorer.” In other words, those with money are able to invest it to make still more, while those with little are highly unlikely to accumulate substantial sums through wage labor.

Such an observation is hardly news to the legions living paycheck to paycheck or on even less. (A regular contributor to the blog Gawker, “A dog,” trenchantly observed that the book “tastes like dry paper.”) There is a relentless drive under capitalism to wring more from the working class. To be sure, the workers can resist these attacks, but only to the extent that they engage in class struggle. The proletariat's place in production uniquely endows it with the potential power and interest to end this misery once and for all by shattering the capitalist order and rebuilding society on an egalitarian socialist basis. Communists strive to render the working class conscious of its historic task.

Piketty, who has declared himself “very much in favour of private property and private capitalism,” simply wants to round the edges of the present one-sided class war that has made life so precarious for so many. Nonetheless, his book encapsulates a certain widespread misunderstanding of how capitalism works. As such, it pro-

vides a foil for the presentation of some basic Marxist economics—especially as Piketty, unlike many modern bourgeois economists, engages with Marxist ideas, however shallowly.

A Capitalist Appeal

While right-wing critics have compared Piketty to Marx (as they do anyone who dares criticize economic inequality), *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* is a product of the “death of communism” ideology prevalent in the post-Soviet world. In the introduction, Piketty reassures the reader that, having come of age amid the collapse of the Soviet Union, “I was vaccinated for life against the conventional but lazy rhetoric of anticapitalism.... I have no interest in denouncing inequality or capitalism per se—especially since social inequalities are not in themselves a problem as long as they are justified.”

Indeed, Piketty's main preoccupation is that unchecked capitalism is “potentially incompatible with the meritocratic values and principles of social justice fundamental to modern democratic societies,” for which he prescribes state intervention to properly guide capitalist markets. What an embellishment of bourgeois democracy! This country's “democracy” is marked by the oppression (and earlier enslavement) of black people, waves of deportations of immigrants, bloody battles with striking workers and a long list of brutal wars the world over. As for France, its “democracy” was exported to Indochina, Algeria and West Africa in the form of forced labor and mass murder, among other crimes.

The core difference between bourgeois and Marxist economic thought is evident from the outset of the book. Piketty posits a society with a unitary set of interests common to all. By his lights, history can be told in terms of the regulation of markets; and since the advanced capitalist powers today are democracies, it is possible for them to legislate “justified” inequality to everyone's benefit. Our starting point, following Marx, is that the history of society is the history of class struggle.

In Marxist terminology, “class” refers to a particular group of people characterized by a common relationship to the means of production. Under various economic systems through the ages, the class made up of the property holders has appropriated the surplus generated by the class made up of the toilers, giving rise to the irreconcilable antagonism between slave owner and slave, feudal lord and serf, capitalist

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October 2011 NYC Occupy protest over economic inequality. Piketty offers to reform capitalism with absurd call for global wealth tax.

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Ebola Crisis...

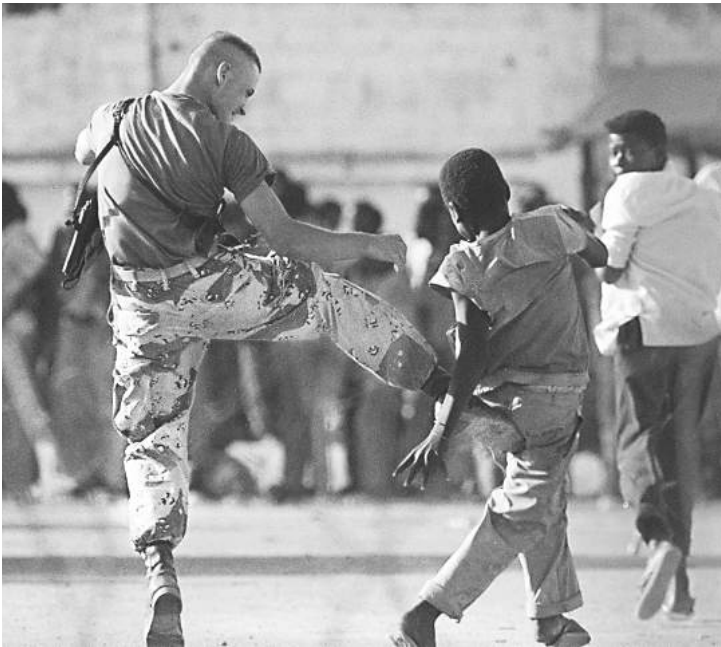
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Now comes the U.S. military intervention, which is hailed by Doctors Without Borders (known by its French initials, MSF), the organization leading treatment efforts on the ground. It is a grotesque lie that the U.S. military—drenched in the blood of untold millions of its victims around the world—can be a force for “humanitarian” relief. The current U.S. mission in West Africa evokes a history of depredations masquerading as “relief” and “peacekeeping,” from the 1992-93 occupation of Somalia during its famine to the 2003 intervention in Liberia. In his announcement, Obama referred to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, when tens of thousands of U.S. troops were dispatched to the devastated Caribbean island. Working alongside UN “peacekeepers” to *block* aid efforts and put down social unrest, their main role was to prevent desperate Haitians from fleeing to the U.S. In both Liberia and Haiti, thousands of UN military and police personnel remain to enforce imperialist “order.”

The Ebola Nightmare

Extremely lethal, Ebola is a hemorrhagic fever caused by a group of threadlike viruses known as filoviruses. When the Ebola-Zaire strain first hit Zaire in 1976, it killed nearly 90 percent of its victims, often within days. Since then, there have been some two dozen outbreaks in Central and West Africa. The virus is highly contagious, spreading among humans through contact with blood, saliva, urine and other bodily fluids. The early flu-like symptoms are similar to those of malaria, dengue fever and other tropical diseases. As the virus worsens, hemorrhaging leads to multiple organ failure.

Though it came on the scene nearly 40 years ago, Ebola was not deemed a money-maker for the profit-gouging pharmaceutical behemoths. With no drug or vaccine yet proven effective for humans, the only way to increase survival rates is with immediate palliative treatment. Safe and sterile quarantine must be coupled with consistent medical attention, including rehydration and the control of secondary infections. During the current outbreak, simple measures that could have contained the disease—from isolating patients and



Mogadishu, 1992: U.S. Marine brutalizes boy during “humanitarian” occupation of Somalia.

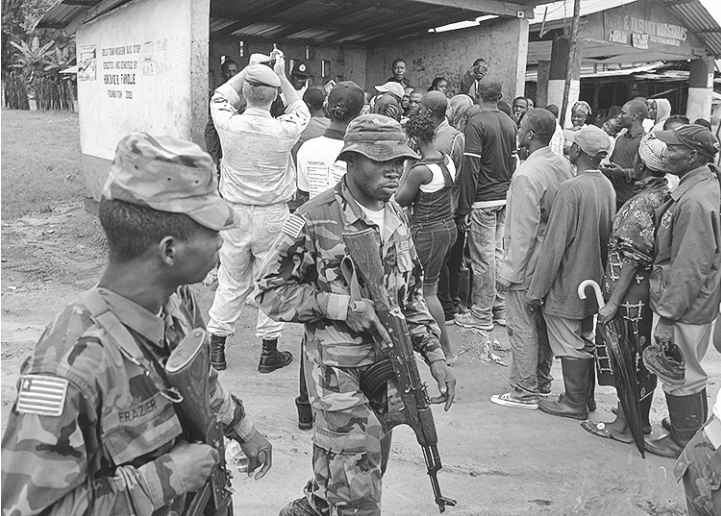
tracing contacts to educating the public—were not taken. If Ebola had broken out in the advanced capitalist world, all hands would have been on deck and it would not have been difficult to contain the virus. Two American missionaries infected in July—an event that brought the media out of its somnambulant state—survived after receiving treatment and experimental drugs in the U.S. This kind of care was not accorded to Olivet Buck, a Sierra Leonean doctor who was refused evacuation to Germany and died.

In the imperialists’ shattered and destitute neocolonies, getting the necessary top-notch care is as likely as squeezing blood from a stone. Before the Ebola outbreak, Liberia had one doctor per 70,000 residents; Sierra Leone one per 45,000; Guinea one per 10,000. Only a small percentage of the population has access to proper sanitation. Though there are major rivers in the region, the lack of water treatment facilities leaves much of the population with little access to clean water. The majority ekes out a living on less than one dollar a day, and half the population is illiterate.

The region has some of the world’s highest maternal as well as infant mortality rates; children regularly die of malnutrition and easily treatable conditions like pneumonia and diarrhea. Now, the over-stretched and overflowing hospitals and

treatment centers have turned into death-traps. Public health has further collapsed: malaria and other medical conditions are being left untreated while pregnant women are giving birth on the streets.

Poverty contributed directly to the West African Ebola outbreak. With no access to safely processed food, villagers depend on game such as chimpanzees,



Liberian soldiers patrol Dolo Town, called Ebola jail by residents under lockdown.

monkeys and forest antelopes that can carry the virus. It is thought that such animals pick up the virus from fruit bats, which seem to be Ebola’s natural reservoir. Earlier occurrences of Ebola were in remote villages, with little chance of spreading; they ran their course with relatively few fatalities. Those who were infected but survived no longer carried the virus. In the current outbreak, however, the disease is spiraling out of control, spreading to teeming urban centers and across borders.

Diseases and infections will never completely disappear. It is an aspect of nature that in order to survive, microbes will mutate and evolve to find an ecological niche in humans and other animals. But little is “natural” about the Ebola crisis today, any more than was the spread of AIDS and its disproportionate death rates that continue to devastate sub-Saharan Africa. The conditions leading to the spread of these diseases were laid down by centuries of slave trade, colonial domination and imperialist plunder that stifled economic development and tore apart the continent’s social fabric.

Heart of Darkness: Colonial Rule in Africa

The Atlantic slave trade, which laid the foundations for much of European as well as American capitalism, devastated large swaths of Africa from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Vast regions were depopulated as some 12 million Africans were seized and taken across the notorious Middle Passage to the Americas.

By the late 1800s, the rapid expansion of world trade fueled competition between the European capitalist powers to establish spheres of influence to control land, markets and sources of cheap labor and raw materials—this was the dawn of capitalist imperialism. Ripping up Africa’s agrarian and nomadic societies, the British tried to create an East African empire

linking Cape Town to Cairo by rail and telegraph, the French sought to spike it by creating an east-to-west colonial belt across central Africa, and the Italians and Germans grabbed bites of whatever was left. Meanwhile, the monstrous King Leopold II of Belgium carved out a regime of terror in the Congo, under which some eight million Africans died. The Dinka people of southern Sudan refer to this period as “the time when the world was spoilt.”

In *The Race to Fashoda* (1987), David Levering Lewis describes how the colonial scramble opened the continent to “institutional chaos, collective panic, and disease and famine.” Where communities were geographically stable, some Africans had developed a degree of resistance to certain tropical diseases such as malaria. The large-scale displacement of populations acted to negate this resistance. In the late 19th century, raids, migrations and agricultural wastage resulting from European encroachment opened much of the Congo basin to the tsetse fly, which devastated whole peoples with sleeping sickness. Shortly after the arrival of British colonists in what is now Uganda, there was an explosion of epidemics like gonorrhea and syphilis, followed by plague and smallpox.

What medical provision the colonialists offered was meant to protect the lives

of Europeans, particularly soldiers. The imperialists’ “contributions” to African epidemics continued into the 20th century. In *The Origins of AIDS* (2011), Jacques Pepin, a professor of microbiology and infectious diseases, noted that Belgian and French efforts to protect European settlers from tropical disease involved using unsterilized syringes and needles to inject native populations with medicine and vaccines. The contaminated equipment likely contributed to the spread of HIV and other deadly diseases.

Lewis observed: “After the collapse and chaos spawned by the intruders would come forced labor and total economic subordination—would come an Africa that could be looked upon by Europeans as being in as desperate need of European uplift as the gospel the White Man’s Burden proclaimed.” Colonial overlords drew arbitrary borders that divided tribal peoples while lumping together historically antagonistic peoples in a single state. When the British rulers boasted that the sun never set on their empire, Ernest Jones, leader of the radical proletarian Chartist movement of the mid 19th century, aptly added, “but the blood never dries.” In their policy of divide to better subjugate, the colonial rulers fomented ethnic, religious and regional divisions, sowing the seeds for the bloody post-independence civil wars that still rage in many parts of the continent.

The portrayal of Africa as an uncivilized, diseased wasteland is wielded to justify everything from imperialist intervention to the racist exclusion of migrants. *Newsweek* (29 August) featured a cover story on Ebola with the picture of a chimp, conjuring up the racist notion of a continent of ape-like savages. The article’s title, “Smuggled Bushmeat Is Ebola’s Back Door to America,” promoted the lie that Africans are trafficking in Ebola-contaminated meat. The baseless story had no other purpose than to whip

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4

WORKERS VANGUARD

up panic and bolster fears of an imminent outbreak in the U.S.

Imperialist Subjugation and Tinpot Rulers

The three West African countries where Ebola is today wreaking havoc, while rich in resources, rank among the world’s poorest. The former French colony of Guinea is the world’s top exporter of bauxite, the raw material used in making aluminum, and also has plenty of gold, diamonds, uranium and offshore oil. Sierra Leone, a former British colony, and Liberia have significant reserves of rubber, iron ore and diamonds. Virtually all of the raw material is carted off by foreign corporate giants.

In the aftermath of World War II, the British and French imperialists ended direct rule, preferring neocolonial bondage under local overseers. The corrupt, brutal tribal-based ruling cliques employ the whip against the populations on behalf of their American and European imperialist masters, on whom they rely for protection. Their regimes reinforce ethnic divisions and promote backward, sometimes horrific social practices. Thus Kenyan nationalist president Jomo Kenyatta defended female genital mutilation as part of “African culture.”

During the Cold War, the central pre-occupation of the imperialists in Africa was to curtail the influence of the Soviet Union. To counter Soviet economic and military aid to nationalist movements and bourgeois nationalist leaders like Ahmed Sekou Toure of Guinea and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, the U.S. and its allies propped up a host of brutal despots like Mobutu in Zaire while funding and arming reactionary insurgents, e.g., in Angola and Mozambique. From its headquarters in Monrovia, the CIA ran agents, subverted governments and organized coups throughout the continent. In the aftermath of the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state, Washington cut the economic cord. The International Monetary Fund demanded debt payment on starvation terms, further destroying the fragile economies of those societies.

The U.S. hold over Liberia began when the country was carved out in the early 19th century, as black freedmen and manumitted slaves from the U.S. were shipped there to establish the Republic of Liberia. Since then, black American colonists and their descendants (Americo-Liberians) have held sway over the indigenous population. In the 1920s, the Firestone Rubber Company effectively took over Liberia and ran it like a slave plantation.

In recent decades, diamonds and timber bankrolled warlords like Charles Taylor, who was ousted as president at the end of the Liberian civil war. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf originally supported Taylor but turned against him, eventually being elected president in 2005 with a promise to end corruption and rebuild the country. Sirleaf was the only African head of state to offer territory for the U.S. to establish a headquarters for its Africa Command (Africom), which operates out of Germany. She was granted the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 after handing over more than a third of Liberia’s land to private logging, mining and agro-industrial enterprises.

The U.S. has increased its military presence in Africa under Obama, from leading the NATO bombing of Libya in

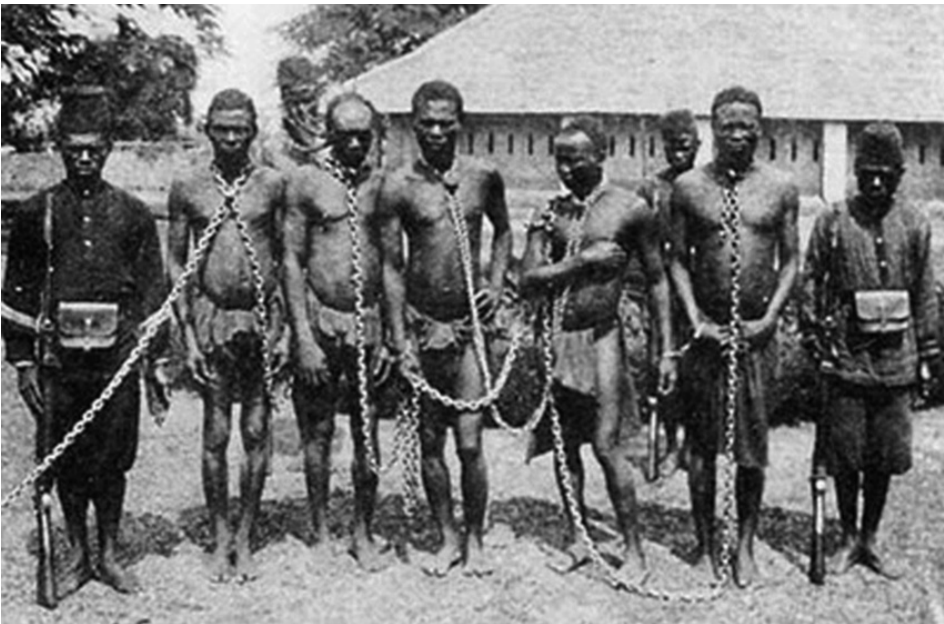
2011 to repeated Special Forces operations and missile strikes in Somalia. Among the imperialists’ concerns is the growing influence of China, Africa’s largest trading partner. As part of its trade for oil and mineral resources for its nationalized industries, China has built hospitals, schools and other infrastructure in many African countries. This contrasts sharply with the legacy left by the imperialist powers: extreme poverty, social backwardness, tribal and ethnic warfare.

Capitalist Criminality

The response of the West African governments to the outbreak of Ebola was denial, indifference and criminal cover-up of the magnitude of the disease. A Doctors Without Borders coordinator called the early response “purely improvisation.” He went on to say, “There is no one to take responsibility, absolutely no one, since the beginning of the crisis.” Guinean president Alpha Condé said while meeting World Health Organization officials in April, “For the moment the situation is well in hand, and we touch wood that there won’t be any new cases.” Many government officials in Liberia simply fled the country.

As the disease spread uncontrollably, governments brutally imposed the *cordon sanitaire*, a medieval practice used in the era of the Black Death in Europe. As in a recent three-day countrywide lockdown in Sierra Leone, throngs of hungry, terrified people facing military troops have been trapped in their squalor.

Meanwhile, local health workers on the front lines continue their selfless fight in a decrepit health care system, abandoned by their fearful families and shunned by their neighbors. Many agonize over having to turn away patients at the gates of treatment centers while bodies lie festering in the street. The *New York Times* (10



Chained Congolese men, victims of Belgian King Leopold II’s murderous colonial plunder.

Located near the Firestone rubber plantation, the town has been on lockdown—an Ebola “jail,” in the words of Firestone workers who live there. At a government hospital in Sierra Leone, workers have gone on strike repeatedly to demand better working conditions, protective gear and pay, which many have not seen for weeks.

Mistrust and hatred of government officials are so high that many believe that Ebola is a conspiracy or simply deny that it exists. Panicked populations have blamed health workers for spreading the virus or accused them of harvesting organs. In mid September, an eight-person team attempting to educate villagers on prevention was killed by a mob in Guinea.

With the collapse of what health care systems existed, superstition fills the void.



Conakry, Guinea: New Chinese-built hospital where first person infected with Ebola was treated.

August) described the situation in Guinea’s capital, Conakry:

“The treatment room at Donka [hospital] was poorly lit and had no sink. There were few buckets of chlorine solution, and the staff found it impossible to clean their hands between patients.... Gloves, in short supply at the hospitals, were selling for 50 cents a pair on the open market, a huge sum for people who often live on less than a dollar a day. At homes where families cared for patients, even plastic buckets to hold water and bleach for washing hands and disinfecting linens were lacking.”

In a clinic in Dolo Town, east of Monrovia, by mid August only one box of gloves had been delivered since April.

Believing that Ebola is an evil spell or the work of witchcraft, many people have sought out “traditional healers.” In Sierra Leone, one healer contracted Ebola from those seeking her help, and died. Those at the funeral washed her body by hand to prepare it for burial, a common ritual. They were then infected, leading to an explosive chain reaction of deaths, funerals and further infections.

Up to now, the pharmaceutical giants have done nothing to develop a vaccine for a disease that largely affects impoverished black Africans. But as Ebola threatens to spread beyond its African confines, pharmaceutical companies have

Syria...

(continued from page 1)

East, thus providing a petri dish for the growth of myriad Islamic terrorist outfits throughout the area. Two such groups, the toothpaste terrorists of the (conveniently unearthed) Khorasan group and the Nusra Front, targeted for drive-by attacks during the initial air raids, are more or less direct links to Al Qaeda, which spun off ISIS itself. Forerunners of Al Qaeda were trained and funded by the CIA as it assembled a reactionary horde to oppose the Soviet Union’s intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Obama—with some assistance from

the British and French imperialists, who maintain interests in the Near East—projects weaving together the “good” terrorists opposed to ISIS with the forces of friendly Arab states, many of which have been/are backers of ISIS, to exterminate the threat *du jour*. The only criterion for membership in this club seems to be that its participants have conflicting interests in the region. A measure of the unintended consequences of this operation is that it is backed by today’s (or is it yesterday’s?) enemy, President Assad of Syria. But as we noted in “U.S. Out of Iraq! No Intervention in Syria!” (WV No. 1051, 5 September), Assad’s approval may backfire on him given that the U.S. maintains its opposition to his rule. It is the duty of

the American working people to oppose any and all U.S. imperialist intervention in Syria, and everywhere else.

Despite the absence of non-delusional policy objectives in the U.S. military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, its purpose, like all the wars of U.S. imperialism, is to enforce and perpetuate its domination of the planet. This was nicely captured by the *New York Times* (24 September) report that Obama’s sermon to the UN left “little doubt that the United States would act as the ultimate guarantor of an international order.”

In addition to the millions of those slaughtered by U.S. imperialism in its wars are the other victims of the decaying capitalist order, both abroad and in

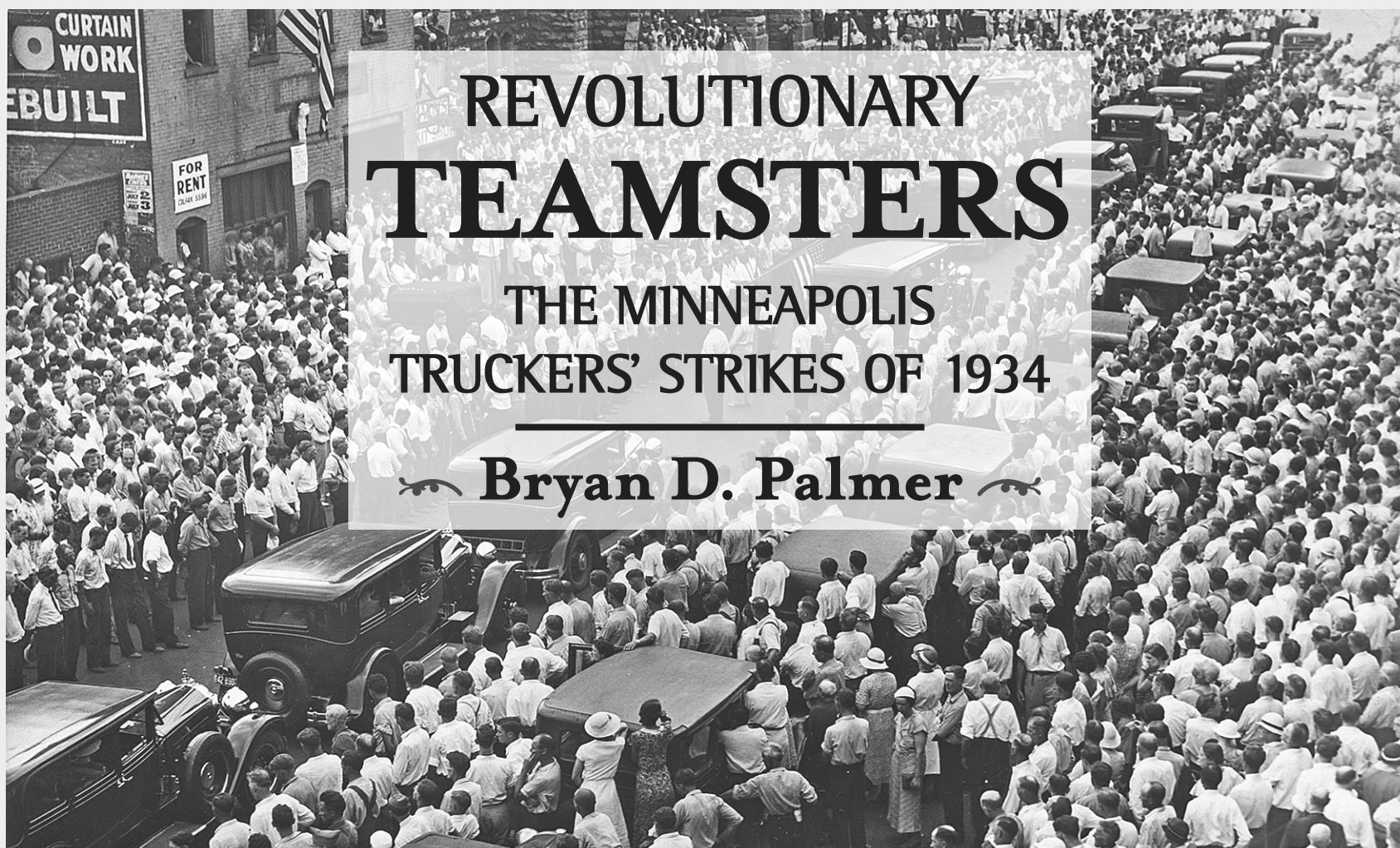
dusted off plans for developing a vaccine, putting it on a fast track for commercialization. The most probable market would be the U.S. military, a huge consumer of vaccines.

The Ebola crisis is yet another marker of the criminality and irrationality of the capitalist order. The World Health Organization had its budget slashed following the global financial crisis, leading to the dissolving of its epidemic and pandemic response department and leaving only one technical expert on hemorrhagic diseases. At the same time, the U.S. ruling class pours billions into warding off the spectre of “bioterrorism.” As journalist Arthur Allen wrote in *Vaccine: The Controversial Story of Medicine’s Greatest Life-saver* (2008), “No price was too high to pay for anything that had the magic word ‘terrorism’ attached to it. Congress was willing to authorize \$1.9 billion to build and maintain a stockpile of smallpox vaccine, and \$1.4 billion to create and stockpile a new anthrax vaccine.”

The inhuman conditions that capitalism imposes on its semicolonial slaves pose in the starkest manner the need for socialist revolutions across the globe. There are crucial proletarian concentrations in Africa—from the powerful industrial workers in South Africa and Egypt to oil workers in Nigeria and dock and rail workers in Kenya—with the potential social power to lead all the miserably impoverished and oppressed in revolutionary struggle. Key to this perspective is the fight to sweep away capitalist rule in the imperialist heartlands, in which an exceptionally important role will be played by black workers in the U.S., descendants of African slaves.

As early as the mid 19th century, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels recognized that the advent of modern science and industry created the potential to eliminate the hunger and deprivation that deform and stunt the lives of the world’s masses. But this cannot be achieved under a system of production for profit. Only through overturning the capitalist system and establishing a planned, collectivized economy on a world scale will the basis be laid for a qualitative expansion of scientific research and technological development to serve human needs, finally overcoming material scarcity. ■

this country. Working people in the U.S. have seen their wages slashed and/or their benefits gutted with no prospects of any real economic revival to reverse the bloodletting of the deep and prolonged recession. Black people continue to be gunned down by the killer cops, with the events in Ferguson revealing the real face of racist capitalist America. Dissatisfaction with those who govern is rampant, matched only by the despair of those who are governed. What is needed is a surge of class struggle and social protests, which will provide the basis for building a revolutionary internationalist working-class party with the purpose of overturning the profit-gorged U.S. imperialist order. ■



Minnesota Historical Society

REVOLUTIONARY TEAMSTERS

THE MINNEAPOLIS TRUCKERS' STRIKES OF 1934

~ Bryan D. Palmer ~

24 July 1934: Minneapolis Teamsters and allies turn out en masse for funeral of Henry Ness, striker killed by police.

A Review and Commentary by E. Tanner Part Two

Part One of this article appeared in WV No. 1052 (19 September).

At the time of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strikes, the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP) and its brand of agrarian populism largely dominated Minnesota politics. A proper appreciation of the capitalist loyalties of FLP governor Floyd B. Olson was essential to charting a course for workers struggle. In his 1937 book *American City: A Rank-and-File History*, Charles Rumford Walker noted that 56 percent of the state's population was foreign-born, and he discussed at length the FLP's Scandinavian-derived plebeian base. These working people were strongly influenced by the Social Democratic parties that had awakened the proletariat in their native countries.

The Scandinavian foreign-language federations had played a major role in the Minnesota Socialist Party (SP). Nationally, the reformist, social-democratic SP had been suffused from its founding with

a strong dose of petty-bourgeois radicalism that derived from the Progressive and Populist movements. Among its members, the class line separating petty-bourgeois populism from unambiguously working-class political and social organizations was not widely understood.

This remained the case even after significant elements of the Scandinavian federations transferred their allegiance to the Communist movement. (The Finnish Federation, by far the largest, comprised roughly half of the national Communist membership in 1922). The confusion over the class nature of farmer-based populism was compounded by the fact that the Minnesota FLP allowed for bloc affiliation of trade unions, which gave it the appearance of a working-class organization. However, the FLP's program clearly reflected its populist origins and its constitution carefully limited trade-union voting power to prevent labor from controlling the party.

The young American Communist movement, of which the CLA's founding cadres were part, was almost shipwrecked on the shoals of farmer-laborism. In the 1924 presidential elections, the Communist Party (CP) came close to giving support to the Farmer-Labor candidacy of the former Republican governor of Wisconsin, Robert La Follette. Only the intervention of Leon Trotsky in Moscow pulled the party back from this oppor-

tunist course. But the Communist International, which was then at the beginning of its bureaucratic degeneration, muddled the waters by insisting that the American Communists continue to call for a two-class party and work within the Farmer-Labor movement. The story of this near-debacle is laid out in the introduction to the Prometheus Research Library's book *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism, Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928* [1992].

The CLA's founding cadres were quite cognizant of the debt they owed Trotsky for this intervention. Their founding document declared unequivocally: "The organization of two classes in one Party—a Farmer-Labor Party—must be rejected in principle in favor of the separate organization of the workers, and the formation of a political alliance with the poor farmers under the leadership of the former ("Platform of the Communist Opposition," *Militant*, 15 February 1929). Less than a year later, Vincent Dunne, who as a CP leader had also served as an FLP ward secretary, explained:

"Any political party composed of two classes, as is the case in this instance, with farmers and workers in the same organization, maintains unity only at the expense of the program put forward by the most exploited and propertyless section. The leadership of such a party can lead only as long as it is able to hold back the thrusts of the workers and satisfy the demands of those elements whose political outlook is bounded by the illusion that it is possible to achieve security under the capitalist order, by acquiring property or enhancing the value of that which they already hold, through reforms, half measures, etc....

"With this political outlook, the leadership, from the vantage point of the farmers' wagon, from time to time sees bogholes in the road ahead and is forced to use the workers as pushers of the cart in such bad spots as political campaigns, financial difficulties, etc.

"That the workers have nothing to gain from this horseplay must be evident to those who give it a little thought."

—"Minnesota F.L.P.—Six Years of Confusion and Disappointment in a Two-Class Party," *Militant*, 18 January 1930

There is some evidence of lingering softness in the Minneapolis CLA toward farmer-laborism. Later that year, the *Militant* (1 November 1930) repudiated the branch's initial agreement to bloc with others recently expelled from the CP, including Jay Lovestone's organization and remnants of the former Finnish-language federation, to found a new regional farmer-labor newspaper. Such unprincipled political alliances

between supporters of Leon Trotsky and Right Communists like Lovestone (supporters of Nikolai Bukharin) destroyed the nascent International Left Opposition in some other countries, and Cannon worked hard to make sure the CLA learned from these mistakes. Whatever the wobbles in the local, significantly the CLA's *Militant* never gave electoral support to the Minnesota FLP. Considering themselves an expelled faction of the Communist Party until mid 1933, the Trotskyists generally supported CP candidates for public office.

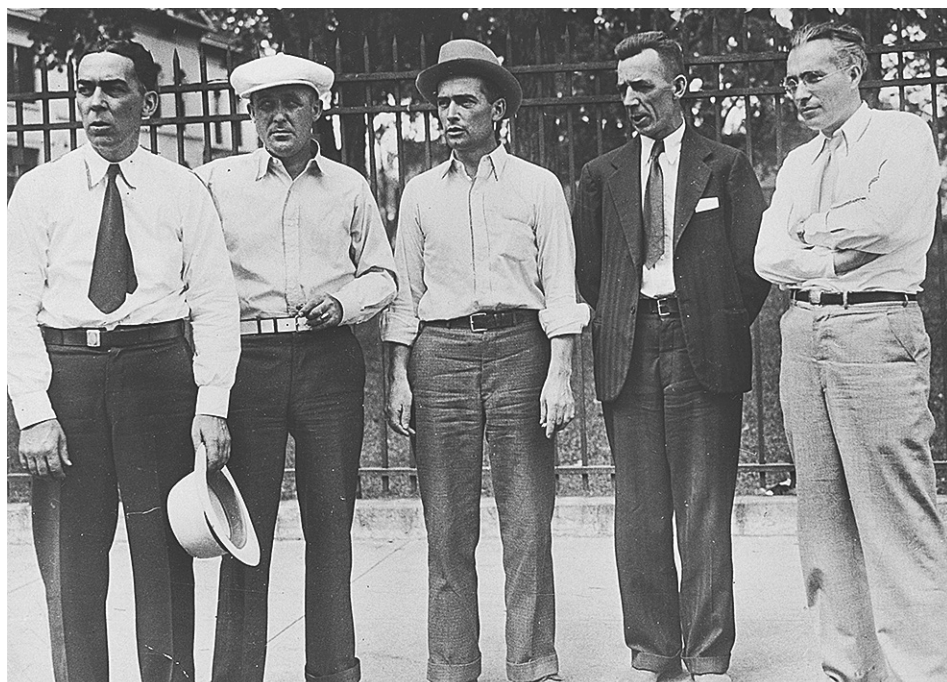
None of this history figures in Palmer's book, a real weakness since he criticizes the CLA strike leadership for "its early inability to mount a revolutionary critique of Farmer-Laborism, which may have fed into a tendency to rely unduly on this political tendency's head spokesman, Governor Floyd B. Olson."

Governor Olson and the FLP

Olson, who had been an IWW member in his youth, was a maverick even by Minnesota FLP standards. He was Minnesota's chief executive officer responsible for capitalist law and order, but he hesitated to become an open strikebreaker, not least because he was on record as supporting the truckers' right to unionize. The organizers of Local 574 had seen to that, having pressured him to speak at a truckers' mass meeting on April 15. (Olson didn't show, but sent a representative to read a support statement.)

Palmer writes that at the time, the Trotskyists "undoubtedly neglected to hammer home relentlessly how this seeming advocate of the producers was bound to turn against the very plebeian constituency that had propelled him into office." He may be right, but there is little evidence of what CLA fraction members argued at the time to their co-workers. Palmer himself notes that the New York leadership was not fully informed of the situation. The *Militant* had exactly one article on the Minneapolis truckers between the end of February and its May 26 issue, and that article didn't even mention Olson or the April 15 mass meeting.

The CLA organizers had to confront a big problem—most of Local 574's ranks were FLP voters with massive illusions in the governor, who cultivated his image as a populist spokesman for the working people. When the *Organizer* began publication on the eve of the third strike, it sought to patiently and pedagogically explain that any intervention by Olson



Minnesota Historical Society

Local 574 president Bill Brown (second from left) with Trotskyists in Minneapolis: Grant Dunne (far left), Miles and Vincent Dunne, Albert Goldman.

would inevitably be on the side of the bosses. Even before National Guard troops appeared on the street, the union journal demanded their removal:

“Governor Olson, in his statement, said he will not take sides in the strike. But his action in mobilizing a battalion of the National Guard on the first day of the strike—is that not taking sides? Many workers will be keenly disappointed both with the statement and the action of Governor Olson. They voted for him in the firm conviction that he would side with them against the bosses. Union men and women have a right to doubt that anyone can be really neutral in the great struggle between capital and labor. But in any case they expected something more than neutrality from the Farmer-Labor Governor. They expected support of their struggle, not the threat of military force against them.

“That is the only way the mobilization of the National Guard can be understood—as a threat against the strikers.”

—“Troops in Minneapolis—What For?”, *Organizer*, 18 July 1934

Olson did not declare martial law and bring out the National Guard until after the “Bloody Friday” massacre of strikers by Minneapolis police. On the heels of that violence, the bosses rejected a compromise deal worked out by federal mediators and accepted by the union. Olson’s pretense that he had mobilized the National Guard to “defend” the strikers was quickly blown apart as the Guard indiscriminately issued permits allowing scab trucks to operate. When the union ordered all its members to report for renewed picket duty on August 1, Olson ordered the Guard to raid strike headquarters and arrest those union leaders it could find. The *Organizer* declared: “Is there one fool who still thinks that Olson’s National Guard is here to help the strikers?” and carried a banner headline “Answer Military Tyranny by a General Protest Strike!”

Olson gambled that he could find non-communist militants in the second tier of strike leaders whom he could coax into settling on terms more favorable to the bosses. That his gambit spectacularly backfired is testimony to just how successful the *Organizer* and the CLA fraction had been in convincing the ranks that Olson was not their ally. *Revolutionary Teamsters* includes an amusing account of the governor’s failed discussions with some of the strike picket captains, who refused to negotiate while union leaders remained in jail. Under pressure from the AFL officialdom—which did not want to call a general strike—Olson quickly backtracked, released the arrested leaders of Local 574 and handed back the union its headquarters.

There was a necessary division of labor between the *Organizer* and the *Militant*. In the face of Olson’s open strikebreaking, the *Organizer* (1 August) published a speech by Albert Goldman that declared, “Judging by the Governor’s actions, one is justified in labeling Governor Olson as an enemy of the working class. He has given the bosses hard words and no blows; he has given the workers soft words and hard blows.” The *Militant* drew the programmatic conclusions:

“The ‘friend of the worker,’ the Farmer-Labor Governor of Minnesota had re-



Minnesota Historical Society photos

National Guard raids offices of Central Labor Union in Minneapolis on 1 August 1934 after martial law declaration by Farmer-Labor Party governor Floyd Olson (inset).

vealed himself to be the bitterest foe of organized labor, the shrewdest supporter of the bosses....

“Under the pretense of helping the strike, Olson has done his level best to crush it.... Taking a leaf from Hitler’s book this ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’ committed the most despotic action American labor has seen in years when he crashed into strike headquarters and jailed strike leaders. His cunning words of support were only slightly more successful than the raw propaganda of the Citizens Alliance and Dan Tobin. This agent of capitalism, like all the rest, needed the mailed fist to get results for the employers....

“Victory or defeat, the curse of the entire labor movement is on Olson. He is forever discredited in the eyes of every worker and honest progressive. The career of Olson as a liberal is over. The curtains that are rung over Olson are rung over the whole gamut of liberalism and Farmer-Laborism.

“Away with it! Clear the road for a revolutionary party of the working class and the overthrow of the rotten system that Olson represents!”

—“A ‘Farmer-Labor’ Strikebreaker,” *Militant*, 4 August 1934

Olson worked assiduously to re-establish his credentials as a “neutral” arbiter. The *Organizer* foolishly helped him by demanding that the governor raid Citizens Alliance offices. The populist demagogue duly issued the orders, an act inconceivable to any bourgeois politician in the U.S. today. The enraged Citizens Alliance sued against the continued imposition of martial law, allowing the FLP leader to posture once again as an opponent of the bosses. In turn, both the *Organizer* and the *Militant* softened their portrayal of Olson. Hugo Oehler wrote in the *Militant*:

“The Farmer Labor Governor of Minnesota is pressed between two warring camps—between the workers and the capitalists, represented by Local 574, and by the Citizen’s Alliance. Whoever exerts the greatest pressure will force this radical petty-bourgeois to alter his course.”

—“Once Again on the Role of Governor Olson,” *Militant*, 18 August 1934

However, Oehler also pointed to the FLP alliance with Roosevelt’s Democratic Party and claimed that, in making demands on Olson, the leaders of Local 574 had simply made use of “division within the camp of the enemy.”

The *Organizer* bent even further, portraying Olson as responsible not to the capitalists whose state apparatus he helped administer but to the voters who elected him:

“There is absolutely nothing strange in the fact that the Governor has made some concessions to this working class pressure. As Governor of the state he wields a great power, but it is by no means a completely independent personal power. As a Farmer-Labor Governor he is obliged to depend on the support of the farmers and the organized workers. They put him in office and they should not be the least bit bashful in presenting demands to him. He can ignore them only by committing political suicide.”

At the same time, the union reiterated its determination to use the power of the picket line and not rely on the governor:

“Feeble efforts are being made in certain quarters—even in the upper circles of the organized labor movement—to ‘whitewash’ Governor Olson. It is being explained that his military raid on our headquarters and the arrest of our leaders and members were meant to ‘help’ the strikers....

“Nobody is going to fool us with such treacherous reasoning. Nothing will induce us to relax our vigilance and rely on the friendship of Governor Olson or anybody else to win our battle for us. We are going to rely now in this critical period, as in the past, on our own strength and on the sympathy and solidarity of our fellow workers and brother unionists. That, and that alone, is the power that will bring us victory.”

—“The Road to Victory,” *Organizer*, 4 August 1934

The ranks held out in the subsequent war of attrition, winning a stunning victory against the formerly invulnerable Citizens Alliance.

On the whole, the CLA proved tactically adept and principled in its handling of Olson during the strike. But the propagandistic softening toward the end reflected an attenuated understanding of the class nature of the Farmer-Labor Party. The *Militant* variously labeled the mercurial governor a “liberal” or a “petty-bourgeois radical.” The *Organizer* tended to treat him as the representative of a reformist workers party. But never did the CLA characterize him as what he was—a demagogic *capitalist* politician who headed a bourgeois-populist third party, a problem correctly noted by Palmer.

This failure was a political *reversion* from the early CLA’s recognition that there is a qualitative difference between a party that bases itself on the working class and claims to stand independently of the capitalist parties, even if it has a

pro-capitalist leadership like the British Labour Party at the time, and a two-class populist party like the Minnesota FLP. More research is needed as to when and how the CLA took this political step backward.

Palmer reasonably proposes that the lack of a slogan calling for a genuine labor party handcuffed the CLA in winning workers to a principled alternative to the trans-class Farmer-Labor Party. The Spartacist League raises the call for a workers party as a propagandistic and algebraic way to pose the need for the working class to break with the capitalist parties and fight for a workers government. At its Second Congress in September 1931 the CLA, with Trotsky’s support, had dropped from its program the demand for a labor party. There was at the time little vibrancy in the AFL unions, which were firmly under the control of the pro-capitalist bureaucrats. The direction of any future working-class upsurge remained unclear. Since the Trotskyists considered themselves an expelled faction of the Communist Party, the labor party slogan would have been understood by the Stalinist ranks as a call for a renewed reformist party like the SP.

By 1934, the situation was beginning to change. However, the lack of a workers party slogan did not prevent the CLA from clearly counterposing a revolutionary party of the working class to Olson and his FLP, as the *Militant* editorial quoted above clearly illustrates. In 1933, Trotsky’s supporters internationally had begun to call for new workers parties and a new, Fourth International to replace the bankrupt Stalinist Communist International.

In the U.S., moves to fuse with A.J. Muste’s American Workers Party (which led the victorious 1934 Toledo Auto-Lite



Olson “Protects” the Strikers

Graphic from front page of the *Militant* (4 August 1934), newspaper of the Communist League of America.

strike) had been proposed even before the July-August Minneapolis strike; the Workers Party of the United States was founded at the end of the year. Governor Olson was up for re-election that fall, and the CLA did not support the FLP or any SP or CP candidate, instead calling for support to the new Workers Party then in the process of formation. Neither did the *Organizer* endorse any candidates; in an October 10 editorial, it warned against unnamed demagogues who “make promises to labor which they do not intend to keep,” which could only have been understood as a reference to Olson.

Opportunist Support to FLP from 1935

If the CLA did not support Olson and his FLP in the 1934 Minnesota elections, neither did the *Militant* polemicize against the Minnesota third party. In contrast, the *Militant* derisively dismissed Upton Sinclair’s “progressive” campaign for California governor on the Democratic Party ticket. The program of the new Workers Party declared: “At present the Farmer-

continued on page 8

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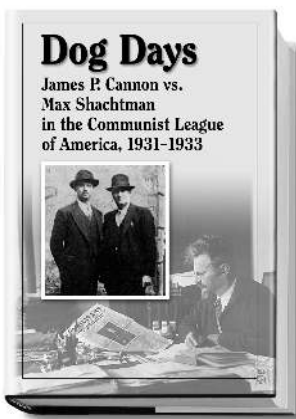
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Teamsters...

(continued from page 7)

Labor party movement in this country is weak and inconsequential,” saying nothing about the very consequential Minnesota FLP (*Militant*, 27 October 1934).

A few months later, in May 1935, the Workers Party went on to cross the class line in a blatant opportunist adaptation, supporting the FLP slate in the Minneapolis municipal elections, in which the FLP mayoral candidate Thomas Latimer narrowly defeated the hated Republican incumbent A.J. Bainbridge. From this point until the FLP merged with the Democratic Party, the American Trotskyists treated the FLP like a reformist workers party.

Latimer would prove himself to be just as bloody a strikebreaker as Bainbridge. But the Trotskyists worked within the FLP for most of the rest of the decade, engaging in an unprincipled struggle against CP supporters for control of this Democratic Party stand-in. These events are outside the scope of Palmer’s book, and he mentions them only tangentially, noting they merit further research. We concur, though Farrell Dobbs’s *Teamster Politics* (the third of three books he wrote on the Trotskyist work in the Teamsters union) sketches the outlines of this capitulation pretty clearly, if dishonestly, since Dobbs claims that the policy of critical support to FLP candidates went back to the early CLA.

While the SWP continued to assert that the Minnesota FLP was a “genuine labor party” even after it merged with the Democratic Party in 1944, the Trotskyists under Cannon’s leadership drew back from flirtations with bourgeois third parties in 1948, when the National Committee debated and decisively rejected support to the presidential campaign of Henry Wallace. Correctly declaring Wallace’s Stalinist-backed Progressive Party to be a “capitalist splinter party unworthy of critical support by the revolutionary workers,” the SWP decided to run its own candidates for U.S. president and vice president. (The Spartacist League now views running for executive office in the bourgeois state to be a violation of Marxist principle, but the Trotskyist movement at the time did not hold this position; see “Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics,” *Spartacist* No. 61, Spring 2009.)

It’s obvious, as Palmer observes, that the Trotskyists’ support to the Minnesota FLP paved the way for their increasing nationwide tendency to politically adapt to the pro-Roosevelt AFL union officialdom, with whom they often blocked against the Stalinists. Trotsky noted this tendency in his 1940 discussions with SWP leaders, including Cannon and Dobbs:

“You are afraid to become compromised in the eyes of the Rooseveltian trade unionists. They on the other hand are not worried in the slightest about being compromised by voting for Roosevelt against you.... If you are afraid, you lose your independence and become half-Rooseveltian. In peacetimes this is not catastrophic. In wartimes it will compro-



Minnesota Historical Society

Socialist Workers Party leaders, including veterans of the Minneapolis Teamsters strikes, before their imprisonment under Smith Act during WWII for revolutionary opposition to U.S. imperialism.

mise us. They can smash us. Our policy is too much for the pro-Rooseveltian trade unionists.”

—“Discussions with Trotsky” (12-15 June 1940), printed in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1939-40)

Trotsky’s words were indeed prophetic, as is clear from *Revolutionary Teamsters’* chapter on the 1940 witchhunt in which the U.S. government—aided and abetted by Teamsters president Daniel Tobin—wrested the Minneapolis Teamsters local from its Trotskyist leadership. Palmer makes use of new research on how the Roosevelt administration railroaded Ray Dunne, Skoglund and 16 others, including Cannon and Albert Goldman, into prison for opposing World War II. Determined to enter the interimperialist slaughter and fight for their own world primacy, there is no way the U.S. ruling class was going to tolerate communists committed to working-class internationalism in the leadership of a major trade union. The outcome was predetermined by the absence of broader revolutionary working-class struggle.

Nonetheless, by supporting the FLP, the Trotskyist Teamsters leaders seriously undercut their ability to build a base in the union for the kind of independent working-class political action *against* the capitalists and their parties that they formally stood for. Rather than pointing to this programmatic capitulation, Palmer finds fault with the failure to build caucuses based on the Transitional Program in the far-flung locals created during the Teamsters’ Northwest over-the-road organizing campaign, which the Trotskyists masterminded (with the cooperation, briefly, of Tobin).

In this, Palmer echoes the line of a series of articles based on partial and now-dated research by Chris Knox that were published in early issues of *Workers Vanguard*. These articles were subsequently reprinted by the embittered clot of ex-Spartacists and their hangers-on calling themselves the Bolshevik Tendency (BT). The BT has long screamed that the Spartacist League has abandoned the trade unions in favor of “community organizing.” These fakers were to be found nowhere near the successful series of labor-centered anti-fascist

demonstrations that the SL initiated in the early 1980s, which kept the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis, for a time, from rallying in Northern cities. Drawing a hard separation between the black plebeian masses and the working class, the BT views the Labor Black Leagues that we initiated in the early 1980s as a diversion from “trade-union work.”

Palmer follows the BT in fetishizing the organizational form of the trade-union caucus. But the caucus is *not* the fundamental vehicle for communist work in the trade unions. That role is reserved for the *fraction of party members*. The fraction is strategic, the caucus episodic. Whether or not to form a caucus is a tactical question, usually depending on whether or not there exist broader forces with whom the fraction can bloc on key issues in order to fight for leadership in the union. In the absence of Trotskyist branches with functioning fractions, caucuses within the Northwest Teamster locals would quickly have gone astray.

The Necessity of Work in the Unions

The 1934 Teamsters strikes broke the back of the Citizens Alliance and made Minneapolis a union town. The impact was such that, some 40 years later, a high-level police official responded to a complaint about double-parked trucks with the observation: “Since 1934, we don’t question anything the Teamsters do” (quoted in Philip A. Korth, *The Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934*, 1995). No more.

Yet another 40 years have passed, during which a one-sided class war has

eroded the organization, wages and benefits that working people wrested from the bourgeois rulers in the momentous class battles of the 1930s and the immediate post-WWII period. There are no union towns left. Non-union shops and “temporary” contract workers are legion, even in industries that were once union, like trucking and warehouse. Wages are poverty-level for huge portions of the American working class, and worse for the marginalized populations of the ghettos and barrios kept under the jackboot of cop terror.

A central obstacle to the necessary mobilization of working men and women to fight in their own interests now, as in 1934, is the pro-capitalist labor fakers who sit atop what remains of the unions, bowing to every anti-labor law and Supreme Court decision, channeling the discontent that roils beneath the surface of U.S. society into the dead end of bourgeois electoral politics. Palmer addresses the current abject state of American class struggle in his last chapter, attempting to draw lessons from 1934. But his effort is marred by jargon reflecting the fads and fancies of what passes for Marxist discourse in academia and dated by his preoccupation with 2011’s Occupy movement, which went the way of most petty-bourgeois protest movements in America, dissolving into electoral pressure politics. In Occupy’s case, this meant support for Barack Obama around the 2012 presidential elections. Trotskyists would do better to contemplate the words of James P. Cannon:

“The purposeful activism of the educated socialists must be directed primarily into the trade unions precisely because they are the immediate connecting link with a broader circle of workers and therefore the most fruitful field of activity. When the socialist idea is carried into the workers’ mass organizations by the militant activists, and takes root there, a profound influence is exerted upon these organizations. They become more aware of their class interest and their historic mission, and grow in militancy and solidarity and effectiveness in their struggle against the exploiters.

“At the same time, the party gains strength from the live mass contact, finds a constant corrective for tactical errors under the impact of the class struggle and steadily draws new proletarian recruits into its ranks. In the trade-union struggle the party tests and corrects itself in action. It hardens and grows up to the level of its historic task as the workers’ vanguard in the coming revolution.”

—“Deeper Into the Unions,” *Labor Action*, 5 December 1936 (reprinted in *Notebook of an Agitator*) ■

Spartacus Youth Club Events

BAY AREA

Thursday, October 9, 7:30 p.m.

The Russian Revolution and the Rise of the Black Industrial Proletariat

SFSU, Cesar Chavez Student Center Room T-153

Information and readings: (510) 839-0851 • sycbayarea@fastmail.net

CHICAGO

Saturday, October 25, 2 p.m.

The Capitalist State: An Instrument of Organized Terror Against the Workers and the Oppressed

University of Illinois Addams Hall, 2nd Floor, Room 200 830 S. Halsted St. (Take Blue Line to UIC-Halsted)

Information and readings: (312) 563-0441 • chicagosyc@sbcglobal.net

NEW YORK CITY

Tuesday, October 21, 7 p.m.

The State: Reform vs. Revolution

City College of New York NAC Rm. 1/209 138th St. and Amsterdam Avenue (Take #1 train to 137th St.-City College)

Information and readings: (212) 267-1025 • nysl@tiac.net

LOS ANGELES

Wednesday, October 8, 7:00 p.m.

Meet the Marxists

UCLA, Kerckhoff Hall, Room 152

Information and readings: (213) 380-8239 • slsycla@sbcglobal.net

TORONTO

Thursday, October 9, 7 p.m.

Defend the Palestinians! For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

University of Toronto Sidney Smith Hall, Room 2114 100 St. George Street

Information and readings: (416) 593-4138 • spartacan@on.aibn.com

VANCOUVER

Wednesday, October 15, 6:30 p.m.

The Struggle for Native Rights Marxism and the Aboriginal Question in Canada

University of British Columbia Irving Barber Learning Centre, Rm. 315 Information and readings: (604) 687-0353 trotskyist_vancouver@shawcable.com

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FROM THE ARCHIVES OF MARXISM

Bolshevik Policy in World War I “Pacifism or Marxism” by Gregory Zinoviev

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Piketty...

(continued from page 3)

and worker. The struggles between these classes are sometimes responsible for revolutionary social transformations.

Marx also recognized that classes do not vie with one another freely but do so as constrained by their relationship to production. The task of enforcing these constraints falls to the state—armed bodies of men that sometimes appear to stand above the fray but in fact serve the interests of the dominant class. Modern capitalist democracies, by perfecting the illusion that the government is responsible to all of society, are particularly effective at concealing the raw class domination on which the capitalist state, like all states, is founded.

Piketty makes many market calculations, and he uses these figures (adjusting for “shocks to capital” caused by wars, political movements, etc.) to attempt to explain the general course of economic development. But the capitalist system is not a fixed thing with “typical” rates of profit, growth, etc., through time. Rather, it is subject to both the changing relationship of forces in the class struggle and the consequences of competition between the capitalists who privately own the means of production. Anarchy of production, the furious chase after markets and the insecurity of existence of the mass of the population are endemic to the system, as are periodic crises that rend society, bring production to a halt, destroy wealth and inflict untold suffering on the working class and poor.

Disappearing Class Struggle

Piketty papers over the great struggles of the 20th century in order to prettify the murderous extremes to which the capitalists have resorted to preserve their profits. While discussing the impact of World War I on wealth accumulation (but not population count), he pays scant attention to the impact of the greatest redistributive act in the history of mankind—the October 1917 Russian Revolution, a product of the tumultuous social struggles sparked by the inter-imperialist war. For the first time in history, the working class created a state power that ripped the means of production out of the grip of the capitalist class and put them at the service of the mass of the population.

Lamenting the Russian Revolution, Piketty glibly claims “the most advanced European countries explored other, social democratic avenues—fortunately for their citizens.” In fact, the Russian Revolution was the opening shot in a series of revolutionary crises that convulsed Europe—and were met with bloody reprisal. In January 1919, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, leaders of the newly-formed German Communist Party, were murdered by right-wing paramilitary forces acting at the behest of the Social Democratic government. The Freikorps proceeded to kill thousands of left-wing German workers in suppressing the workers councils that had formed nationwide. At the same time, a wave of factory occupations in Italy threatened the capitalist order. A few years later, the Italian bourgeoisie resorted to the fascist regime of Mussolini to protect its property and rule. In Germany, repeated defeats of the proletariat opened the door to Hitler’s rise to power the following decade. Such are the “fortunate” avenues of Piketty’s social democracy!

Piketty fares no better when addressing more recent events. He opens his book by referring to the 2012 Marikana massacre, in which police gunned down striking South African miners. He reduces the coldblooded killing to a “tragedy” brought about by “distributional conflict.” In fact, the massacre was a stark example of the capitalist state serving the interests of the bosses. Piketty further contends: “After the tragic loss of life, the company finally proposed a monthly wage of 75 euros.” Nonsense—it was the continued strike that brought victory to the workers, touching off a strike wave throughout South Africa. Miners in the platinum belt went on strike again earlier this year, winning a substantial wage increase after a bitter struggle.

3 OCTOBER 2014



Progress

Karl Marx’s seminal work *Capital* analyzed the workings of capitalist production, which are mystified by bourgeois economists.

Piketty claims to be a disinterested observer. But while he denies class struggle as a motor force in history (instead finding it an unfortunate excess of “distributional conflict”), he is squarely in the camp of one of the classes in struggle: the capitalist class. His policy proposals are motivated as reforms necessary to prevent future outbreaks of conflict from marring the smooth functioning of the capitalist order.

In France, with a more established social-democratic academic milieu, Piketty’s book was not such a big deal when published in 2013. A review in *Libération* (17 October 2013) noted that it did not touch on social domination, violence, exploitation or class battles, describing it as “a conceptual regression shaping an impoverished vision of the social world.” The review aptly concluded that Piketty’s aim in reducing inequality in wealth was to “give meaning” to wage inequality so as to better legitimize it.

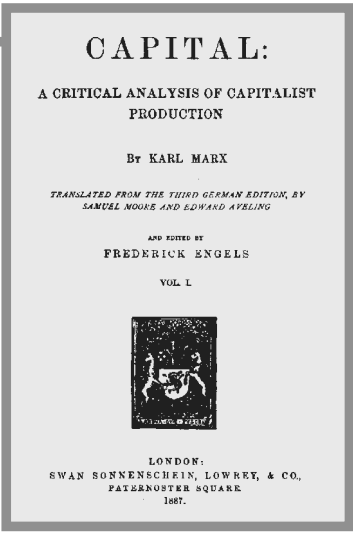
This criticism was made by a leftist intellectual who sees in this magnum opus not only a pro-capitalist manifesto but a right-wing neoliberal one at that. That evaluation is entirely consistent with Piketty’s political profile. In the lead-up to the 2007 French presidential elections, Piketty served as economic adviser to hardline “law and order” Socialist Party (SP) candidate Ségolène Royal. The same year, he denounced the 35-hour workweek in France as a “major error.”

Only in the relatively backward political context of the United States, where there is not even a mass reformist workers party like the SP, can Piketty be mistaken for a radical. While touring the U.S. earlier this year, Piketty met U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew, gave a talk to Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers and a lecture at the International Monetary Fund. Although Piketty may express some sympathy for the plight of the poor, his message serves the concerns of a different audience.

Bourgeois Economics for the 21st Century

Piketty wrongly casts his work in the mold of classical political economy, harking back to Adam Smith and David Ricardo. The strength of those economists, who paved the way for Marx, was that they sought to distinguish capital and value from the pure accumulation of wealth. As ascendant capitalism was at the time displacing the old feudal order, such an approach was needed to explain how a factory owner differed from a landed aristocrat.

Writing in the age of bourgeois triumphalism spawned by the demise of the Soviet Union, Piketty makes no such distinctions. He defines “capital” to be any and all wealth and renders it a timeless category present across all human history, or at least back to the first year AD. This definition freely mixes land and home ownership with other forms of wealth, including stock holdings, which guarantee a stake in the share of profit of a capitalist enterprise. The absurdity of his method is shown when Piketty calculates the average market value of slaves to factor them into the total capital of the U.S. In so doing, he denies what Lincoln and the Radical Republicans intuitively knew—that slavery in the U.S. was a different form of production than capitalism, and a war needed



to be waged to smash the institution.

Classical political economy focused on the character of markets. Smith and Ricardo, in seeking to account for what it meant for things to be exchanged for items of equal value on the market, adhered to a labor theory of value. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith wrote: “The value of any commodity, therefore, to the person who possesses it, and who means not to use or consume it himself, but to exchange it for other commodities, is equal to the quantity of labour which it enables him to purchase or command. Labour, therefore, is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities.”

Marx, building upon and going beyond that tradition, saw in capitalism a new arrangement of productive forces. The market, which had existed before the advent of capitalism, had become so generalized that labor power itself was turned into a commodity—that is, the ability to work was offered on the market to the highest



Reuters

September 2012: South African platinum miners march at Lonmin’s Marikana site, where cops shot dead 34 of their comrades. Miners won historic pay hikes through hard-fought strikes.

bidder in exchange for wages. Prior class systems had made explicit the exploitation of labor; for example, the peasant might work two days a week for himself and four for his lord. Capitalism concealed that exploitation under the veil of the market. A worker may produce eight hours worth of value but only be compensated for, say, three of them in his wages. The other five hours create “surplus value,” the source of profit for the capitalist. Under this system of wage slavery, the exact fraction of the total value added by a worker that goes back to him is determined by a contest of forces in the class struggle.

Capital: What It Is and Isn’t

For Marx, following Smith and Ricardo, capital is not just any old form of wealth, but that contributing to the process of capitalist production. Take an expensive watch sitting in a cabinet. It is displayed wealth, not capital. While gold may find use in the manufacture of electronics or luxury items, gold bars in a warehouse are not capital either. That gold may speculatively fluctuate in value, but it is not involved in production, and cannot be considered as capital when examining the

amount of goods and services generated and distributed by a society.

In a production cycle, capital is both created and consumed. Thus, it is not simply a fixed “stock,” but a flow of expenditure with two distinct components. Variable capital is the portion spent on wages, so named by Marx because the investment differs from the amount returned, with the difference representing surplus value. Constant capital is the portion consumed in the course of production, as raw material and as wear and tear on machinery or other depreciation of equipment. From the standpoint of the economy as a whole, constant capital also includes non-productive expenses socially necessary to the ruling class: cops and security guards to keep the workers in line, teachers to maintain a certain level of knowledge, officials to fill administrative and governmental posts, a military, etc.

The largest part of what Piketty incorrectly counts as capital is housing, which he has constituting nearly half the capital in modern-day Britain. Housing is simply a consumer good. A family that owns its home does not derive income from it. Even if that house is sold for more than the purchase price (by no means guaranteed), the proceeds go toward buying or renting another dwelling—or paying for nursing home care. Piketty’s treatment of housing serves to efface class distinctions, slotting in many members of the working class as “owners of capital.”

Due to the longevity of housing stock, the cost of construction has long since been recouped for most housing units, which in addition have changed hands many times. The capitalists who own residential real estate (typically banks and financial institutions) are almost completely separated from those who develop it. Once a house is sold as a consumer good, the income capitalists derive from housing—rent, inter-

est and speculative gains—is nearly completely divorced from its production and reproduction. This income is combined with other sources of financial income and then directed elsewhere. Capitalist income derived from residential real estate is thus simple parasitism.

In this aspect, modern housing is very similar to agricultural land in the 19th century. Classical political economists did not regard land as capital, with Ricardo arguing that “the interest of the landlord is always opposed to that of the consumer and manufacturer.” Basing himself on Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, the pre-eminent liberal intellectual in mid Victorian England, argued for a confiscatory tax on the income of the landed class: “They grow richer, as it were in the sleep, without working, risking, or economizing.... In what would they have been wronged if society had, from the beginning, reserved the right of taxing the spontaneous increase of rent, to the highest amount required by financial exigencies?” Mill’s proposal to tax away almost the entire income of the landlord class was far more radical in its time than Piketty’s proposal for a global wealth tax.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Scotland...

(continued from page 12)

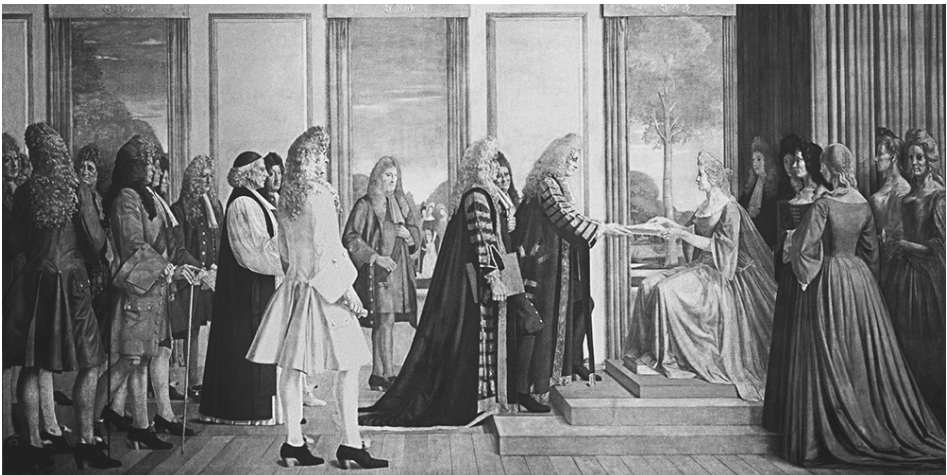
With the “Better Together” campaign offering voters only more of the same—aside from last-minute promises to grant more powers to the Scottish parliament, not to mention another royal baby—an audience member at a televised debate asked Darling: if we would be better together, why are we not better now?

Support for the yes campaign has also grown as a measure of defiance of the incessant outpouring of vile English chauvinism emanating from the London press and political pundits. Even before the referendum deal had been agreed, the *Daily Mail* railed against Scotland’s first minister and Scottish National Party (SNP) leader Alex Salmond. One headline blared: “If Mr Cameron fails to stand up to the devious, slippery Alex Salmond, the end of the Union will be his wretched legacy” (26 January 2012). Another *Mail* article pontificated that “the Union of England, Scotland and Wales” is nothing less than “history’s greatest success story” (29 January 2012). When polls showed a slight majority for the yes campaign, the *Sun*’s English edition (8 September) ran the vile anti-Scottish headline “Jocky Horror Show,” while the *Guardian* (8 September) headline trumpeted: “Last Stand to Keep the Union.” To judge by the hysteria in the bourgeois press, one might think that the SNP is about to re-enact the 1745 uprising by the Jacobites (followers of Charles Edward Stuart, the son of a Catholic pretender to the British throne) that aimed to overthrow the Protestant ascendancy and threatened the 1707 union of the Scottish and English parliaments.

As Marxists we oppose the whole edifice known as the “United Kingdom”—comprising the monarchy, the House of Lords and the established (Protestant) churches and incorporating the Orange statelet in Northern Ireland. The Westminster parliament embodies the privileged status accorded to banking and finance capital in London and the South East of England by the ruling class, which is contemptuous of the now de-industrialised areas of northern England as well as of Scotland and Wales. Doubtless there are many people in Northumbria, Lancashire and the Midlands who would like to go with Scotland to escape Westminster rule.

We support the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales, which includes the right to form independent states. In itself, the referendum does not pose an issue of principle and we do not advocate either a yes or a no vote. Our programme is for a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles. Within such a federation, we do not predetermine what Scotland’s status will be—an independent workers republic, an autonomous region or any other status that is compatible with working-class rule.

As Marxists, we have long upheld the right of self-determination for Scotland. But, as distinct from nationalists, who support separation in all cases, whether or not we advocate independence depends on the depth of national antagonisms between the



Walter Thomas Monnington

Painting commemorates 1707 Union of Scotland and England.

working people of the different nations. In the case of Scotland today the evidence is contradictory. While the polls indicate a rise in support for independence, opposition to separation remains high, estimated at well over 40 per cent in the population as a whole. As regards the trade unions, the Scottish TUC issued a statement at the Britain-wide annual TUC Congress in Liverpool on 8 September which said: “The STUC and unions representing the majority of union members in Scotland have democratically decided not to recommend either a YES or NO vote.”

The high level of opposition to Scottish separation testifies to the degree of assimilation that exists, in the absence of decisive differences of language or religion, between the Scottish and English—as well as the Welsh—nations. By contrast, in Canada we call for Quebec independence in order to remove the roadblock of national antagonisms that divides the workers of English Canada and Quebec, poisoning prospects for united class struggle against capitalism. In Scotland, the reformist left groups are solidly for a yes vote. Their perspective has nothing to do with the Leninist approach of trying to get the national question off the agenda. Instead, they shamelessly promote illusions in the bourgeois-nationalist SNP as the means to resist the Tory government.

Our approach to the national question is guided by the need to minimise the barriers to working-class unity. As proletarian internationalists, we give no support whatsoever to nationalism, whether it be the great power chauvinism of the oppressor countries or the nationalism of the oppressed. We vehemently oppose the British chauvinism and racism which is being whipped up by the UK Independence Party (UKIP), who are feeding off relentless attacks on immigrants’ rights imposed previously by Labour and now by the Tories. The reactionary Orange Order plans a march in Edinburgh to bang its drums for the Union. Given the Orangemen’s history of violent provocations against the oppressed Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, their support for the pro-UK campaign will be more likely to entice Scots of Irish Catholic background to vote yes.

We oppose Scottish nationalism and warn against illusions that an independent capitalist Scotland will shelter working people from the chill winds of capitalist austerity, or that it will provide an opt-out from British imperialism and its wars. As an opposition to British imperialism, the SNP is not about to set the heather ablaze. Rather these nationalists are committed to preserving “a strong, new relationship between Scotland and the rest of the UK.” Furthermore, the SNP’s “new” Scotland will bow to the monarchy, the cornerstone of that reactionary edifice known as the “United Kingdom.” In the SNP’s words, “the Queen will be our Head of State, the pound will be our currency and you will still be watching your favourite programmes on TV.” Such toadying to the Crown would shame even the likes of robber-baron Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish-born 19th-century U.S. steel magnate who opposed “kings and queens and privilege in all its forms” and said: “A king is an insult to every other man in the land.” The minimum condition for any semblance of sovereignty for Scotland must be a break with the English monarchy

and the establishment of its own currency.

When it comes to the foreign policy of an “independent” Scotland, the SNP can best be described as “junior imperialists in waiting.” The nationalists are committed to maintaining Scotland’s membership of the major Western imperialist clubs—the NATO military alliance and the European Union. Earlier this year, Alex Salmond expressed his support to NATO’s current vendetta against Vladimir Putin’s Russia. The SNP leader declared his support for the NATO-installed, fascist-infested regime in Kiev, saying that he had “no hesitation in condemning Russia’s activities in the Ukraine [and] the illegal annexation of the Crimea” (bbc.co.uk, 11 May). Support for such forces is consistent with

founded as an economic adjunct to NATO against the Soviet Union and remains the vehicle with which the European capitalists jointly exploit the European workers, while its more powerful imperialist members lord it over the weaker states.

The yes campaign’s popularity in Scotland does not rest primarily on the SNP’s attitude towards the EU, or its position on currency union. As one punter [man on the street] said, the problem is not what currency to use, but how to obtain enough of it. The SNP has skillfully positioned itself as the only viable alternative to Tory rule in Scotland, building on their record in 2011 when they defied the polls to win a majority in the Scottish parliament. Back then, the SNP’s electoral victory did not indicate a vote for independence. Rather the SNP built its reputation among voters with a range of populist policies, including free prescriptions, free personal care for the elderly and a freeze on the council tax, in addition to refusing to impose university tuition fees. These minimal measures don’t begin to reverse the cuts to welfare provision of recent decades, but in the absence of a viable alternative coming from Labour, people turn to the SNP.

The growth of the SNP is also a product of the refusal of the trade-union leadership to mount any effective class struggle against Tory government austerity—itself a product of their abiding ties to Labour and to the capitalist order. The treachery of the trade-union leadership was clearly shown in October last year at

Reformists gave pink tinge to Scottish independence drive.



the SNP’s enthusing over the Nazi-loving Baltic nationalists who were fomenting counterrevolution in the Soviet Union more than two decades ago.

While there is much opposition to NATO membership in Scotland, illusions in the EU are common. Just as the single European currency is instrumental in the impoverishment of poorer countries such as Greece within the EU, a currency union with England would cede control over Scotland’s interest rate, spending and monetary policy to the Bank of England, making a mockery of Scottish sovereignty. We are opposed in principle to the EU, the imperialist conglomerate which was

Grangemouth, Scotland’s only oil refinery. The union was set up for attack by the Labour Party leadership, which instigated a witch hunt against Stephen Deans, who was then a senior shop steward at Grangemouth and also chair of the local Labour Party branch. Labour leader Ed Miliband ordered a police investigation of the branch, over alleged corruption in the selection of a parliamentary candidate. And although not a shred of evidence was found, the oil bosses continued to hound Deans. On the eve of a strike by workers in the plant in defence of their union representative, oil boss Jim Ratcliffe threatened to close Grangemouth petrochemical

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facility. Rather than fight, the leadership of Unite, Britain’s biggest trade union, called off the strike before it began. They signed a deal which included a three-year pay freeze, a no-strike agreement and an end to the final-salary pension plan—and hailed the outcome as a victory.

For the pro-capitalist bureaucracy, “saving jobs” means the workers must make sacrifices to keep the company viable. Alex Salmond, who helped broker the Grangemouth deal, bragged that the plant would now have a “bright future.” At the time we wrote: “Some future. Grangemouth—one of Scotland’s few remaining industrial complexes, where the trade union has now been crippled and workers cowed into submission—indeed prefigures the kind of future the working class can expect in [a] capitalist Scotland, independent or otherwise” (*Workers Hammer* No. 225, Winter 2013-2014 [reprinted in WV No. 1035, 29 November 2013]).

Foot Soldiers for Pro-NATO Nationalists

The reformist left in Scotland, notably the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), has found its niche, selling the independence campaign to working-class areas of Scotland where the nationalists have difficulty penetrating. Tommy Sheridan demagogically put it: “You vote for independence and you will never have to endure another Tory government in Scotland” (published in *Socialist Review*, July/August 2014). The SSP’s Colin Fox, who sits on the Yes Scotland Advisory Board, does a hard-sell for a *capitalist* Scotland, saying: “The referendum offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure self-determination for Scotland, to establish a left of centre social democratic state and free five million Scots from the yoke of British imperialism” (*The Case for an Independent Socialist Scotland* [no date]).

In contrast to these reformists, as far back as 1992 we cut through the SNP’s populist façade in a single sentence that holds up well today. Our article said:

“Although today the SNP uses a lot of populist rhetoric, seeking to shake off its ‘Tartan Tory’ image, the bottom line for these bourgeois nationalists is that they want to become the exploiters in their own right of the Scottish workers, and are fishing around for a larger imperialist power to become their sponsor.”

—“Tory Ravages, Labour Perfidy Fuel Scottish Nationalism,” *Workers Hammer* No. 128, March-April 1992

In the tradition of Lenin’s Bolsheviks, we stand for equality for *all* nations, as opposed to reformists, who divide the world into “good” and “bad” nations. The good nations are oppressed, and only they deserve the right to self-determination. Thus the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) for example does not call for the right of self-determination for the Russians in Crimea, because of Russia’s great power status. But the good/bad nations theory presents obvious problems when applied to Scotland, which for reformists is “tainted” by its involvement in the Empire.

According to leading SWPer Alex Callinicos, the Scottish people “have not suffered national oppression at the hands of the UK state.” By their own logic, the SWP ought to deny Scotland the right to self-determination. But, Callinicos points out, the pro-independence campaign is drawing in the crowds. Indeed, Tommy Sheridan’s speaking tour “had up to 12,000 working class people packing out meetings all over Scotland to hear the left case for independence.” So what is a poor opportunist to do? Jumping on the independence bandwagon, the SWP conjures up a scenario wherein independence for Scotland would be a blow against British imperialism. An article by Keir McKechnie in *Socialist Review* (July/August 2014) gushes that, “independence for Scotland would diminish Britain’s role as the junior partner to US imperialism, seriously weakening both sides of the so called ‘special relationship.’” More than that, “the removal of Trident nuclear submarines from the Clyde would be a massive blow to Britain’s position as a leading nuclear state and a real threat to the ability of the US to use Britain as a



Workers Hammer

launch pad for its missiles in Europe.”

The notion that Scottish independence would be a blow against British imperialism begs the question, why in the world would the Scottish “NATO nationalists” lead an “anti-imperialist” struggle? The only evidence McKechnie cites is the SNP’s commitment to getting rid of Trident nuclear submarines—a commitment the SWP takes as good coin. Since counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991-92, Scotland’s nuclear submarine and Trident missile base at Faslane no longer occupy the same strategic importance for NATO as its bases did during the anti-Soviet Cold War. In this post-Soviet context the SNP felt emboldened to loosen Scotland’s ties with England.

In the days of the Empire, the Scots played a very valuable role as junior partners to the English rulers. The 1707 treaty allowed Scottish companies access to England’s colonial and domestic markets; Scots were represented in the East India Company out of proportion to their numbers in the population and, in the Caribbean, as historian Tom Devine noted: “The sugar, tobacco and cotton produced by these slave-based economies were absolutely central components in Scottish overseas commerce for most of the eighteenth century” (“Did Slavery Make Scotia Great?”, 2011). Scottish regiments played a major part in the British subjugation of India and other overseas territory which “was acquired and defended in the final analysis by the musket and the cold steel of sword and bayonet” (Tom Devine, *Scotland’s Empire*, 2003). The Scots also made significant contributions to Britain’s industrial revolution, including in the sciences and engineering. However, with the decline of British imperialism the English ruling class no longer needs Scotland.

In the period following World War II, when Britain was faced with a dramatic shrinkage of its role in the world economy, the Labour government elected in 1945 undertook extensive nationalisations of industry to help British capitalism compete in the world market. The ruling class also conceded welfare reforms such as the National Health Service as a sop to the working class. These reforms consolidated support for (old) Labour among the working class throughout Britain and enabled it to become the dominant party in Scotland (and in Wales). Thus, in the post-war period, Labour became part of the glue that held the “United Kingdom” together.

The strains on the Union increased significantly with the attacks on welfare provision and privatisations of the era of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. Particularly during this period, the British capitalist rulers strengthened finance capital at the expense of manufacturing. The defeat of the Britain-wide miners union in the 1984-85 strike paved the way for the atomisation of the working class.

A key point in the alienation of the Scots was the Thatcher government’s imposition in 1989 of the hated Poll Tax in Scotland a year before the rest of the country. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the Scots overwhelmingly voted Labour in elections, only to be faced with Tory governments in Westminster. By the time Labour finally did get elected in 1997, under Tony Blair, the party was indistinguishable from the Tories on key questions such as hostility to the trade unions

and support for banking and finance. In that sense the advent of New Labour was pivotal in driving the working class in Scotland to support the nationalists.

Since the Spartacist League/Britain was founded in 1978 we have consistently upheld the right of self-determination for Scotland. We recognise that the right of self-determination also implies the right *not* to separate, an option we have argued for in the past. We wrote: “we are for the *right* of self-determination, but call on the Scottish people to exercise that right by choosing to stay in the same state as the other peoples of Britain” (*Spartacist Britain* No. 1, April 1978). The Scottish (and Welsh) sections of the proletariat have often played a vanguard role in Britain-wide class struggle. Marxists do not have a positive programme on the national question. How we apply the right to self-determination depends on how best to further the class struggle.

Scottish nationalism was and is conditioned not by opposition to British imperialism, but by its *decline*. The SNP became a factor on the political scene in the 1970s with the slogan, “it’s Scotland’s oil.” When North Sea oil came on stream, the British capitalist rulers looked upon it as the solution to the country’s economic woes. The Thatcher regime promoted North Sea oil and gas as the country’s main source of energy while gutting the coal industry, largely as a political move to destroy the militant miners union. But even at its most productive, when revenues poured into the City of London, North Sea oil did not fundamentally improve British capitalism’s position relative to that of its rivals. North Sea oil has now passed its peak. With the cost of exploration and extraction growing, oil companies are shifting their investments to more lucrative areas of the world.

Faced with a further decline in oil profits, the British ruling class increasingly



Union-News.co.uk

Stephen Deans, victimized union official at Grangemouth refinery (left) in 2013.

views Scotland as a net economic drain. By contrast, Catalonia, which is demanding a referendum on independence from Spain, is the most economically advanced part of that country. Sentiment to cut the ties with Scotland is quite widespread among the English population too. Nowadays, chauvinist ranting about the cost of subsidising Scotland is no longer confined to the right-wing press. As Scottish journalist Iain Macwhirter recently noted, “you would think the liberal *Guardian* would be an exception,” but its readers share the assumption “that Scotland has been living off English taxpayers money and finally been found out” (heraldscotland.com, 14 August).

The devastation of manufacturing jobs in Scotland, as elsewhere in Britain, is the result of decades of treachery by Labour, old and new, and class collaboration. Today, all that the SSP and their ilk have to offer working people is the “bright future” promised by the SNP in an independent capitalist Scotland. One doesn’t have to be a revolutionary Marxist to see through some of the SNP’s rhetoric: when a BBC interviewer recently asked two people from the Shetland Isles—one of whom was a yes voter and the other a no voter—whether the oil belongs to Britain, Scotland or the Shetlands, both retorted: it belongs to the oil companies!

A capitalist Scotland does not have a bright future. In any event, the fundamental task will remain: building a leadership that is committed to proletarian socialist revolution, centrally in England, and to the overthrow of the entire system of Westminster parliamentary rule. The programme of the Spartacist League/Britain is to win the workers to the perspective of building a party capable of leading the struggle to bring down capitalist rule and the establishment of a federation of workers republics in the British Isles. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

**Down With the Monarchy and the United Kingdom!
For a Federation of Workers Republics in the British Isles!**

Behind Scotland's No Vote on Independence

LONDON—In a hotly contested referendum on 18 September, voters in Scotland rejected independence by 55 per cent to 45. In the run-up to the vote, the British government in Westminster was alarmed by a poll showing a majority for independence. What is credited with persuading Scots to remain in the “United Kingdom” were the intervention by Scottish Member of Parliament (MP) Gordon Brown, the Labour Party former prime minister who stressed the economic risks that independence would bring, and the unqualified offer of more powers to the Scottish parliament.

Despite the result, the kingdom is increasingly disunited, as indeed are the parties on the winning side. The vote saved the political career of Conservative prime minister David Cameron, but he faces a revolt by the right wing of his own party, which blames him for the fact that the Scottish nationalists came close to overturning the 307-year-old Union of England and Scotland. In part to appease this wing, which opposes any concessions to Scotland, the morning after the vote, Cameron declared that the promised changes in the Scottish parliament will be linked to restricting Scottish MPs in Westminster from voting on “English questions.” Even by the standards of Westminster’s disdain for Scotland, Cameron’s backsliding was breathtaking.

In unleashing a torrent of English chauvinism, Cameron is also playing to the ultra-chauvinist UK Independence Party, which is pushing for a British exit from the European Union (EU). Cameron has promised a referendum on EU membership if the Conservatives win next year’s general election.

The British rulers increasingly view Scotland as simply a net cost to the treasury. At the same time, sections of finance and banking capital in the City of London, which dominates British capitalism, feared the fallout of a vote for independence. The largest net exporter of financial services, insurance and pensions in the world, Britain gets a third of its \$67 billion financial trade surplus from business within the EU, a trade bloc lorded over by the top European powers. The City financiers are thus worried about the possibility of Britain exiting the EU. (Some U.S.-based investment banks are considering moving their European headquarters to Ireland in case Britain does leave.) Concerned that Scottish independence would increase this likelihood, sectors of the City urged Scotland to remain in the UK.

Cameron’s proposal for “English votes for English laws” in Westminster was also a missile launched at the Labour Party. With more Scottish MPs than any other party, Labour could find itself unable to get its legislation passed in the House of Commons. Labour’s base in Scotland is so angry over the party’s trampling on the interests of working people that many rust-belt areas that were once rock-solid Labour territory—including Glasgow, Scotland’s largest city, as well as Dundee, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire—voted for independence even while many people despise the Scottish nationalists. One trade-union leader quipped that the referendum was a “near-death experience” not just for the United King-



September 11: Glasgow rally prior to Scottish independence referendum.

dom but for the Labour Party as well.

Millions of people—not only in Scotland, but also in Wales and the former industrial areas of northern England—would have been delighted to see Scotland vote for independence, simply to inflict a resounding defeat on the despised Cameron and also on Westminster. Many people who voted for independence viewed their vote as a rejection of government attacks on health care, education and welfare. Among 16- and 17-year-olds, who typically see no difference between Labour and the Tories, sentiment was strongly for independence. On the other hand, many working-class people, understandably fearing economic insecurity and mistrusting the nationalists, stuck with “the devil you know” and voted no.

Scottish nationalist leader Alex Salmond is a populist who is equally at home talking up his support for the National Health Service as he is in talks with bankers and in his (frequent) meetings with the “Dirty Digger,” newspaper baron Rupert Murdoch. Salmond’s version of independence is meagre, based on forming a defence force out of the Scottish regiments in the British army, while remaining subordinate to the British crown and keeping the pound ster-

ling as the currency. The credibility of the independence campaign was undermined when the governor of the Bank of England insisted that in the event of independence, currency union with England would be incompatible with Scottish sovereignty.

The Scottish nationalists have benefited from the absence of a leadership of the working class that is willing to wage a class-struggle fight against austerity. Overwhelmingly, the reformist left has been lulling working people into support for the bourgeois nationalists, selling the lie that life would be better in an independent capitalist Scotland. What is needed is to forge a new working-class leadership based on the perspective of socialist revolution to overthrow capitalist rule.

The article reprinted below, dated 13 September, originally appeared in *Workers Hammer* No. 228 (Autumn 2014), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain, under the title, “Down With English Chauvinism! No Illusions in Scottish Nationalism! For Workers Republics.” Upholding the right of Scotland to self-determination, the SL/B did not advocate either a yes or a no vote on independence. With 85 per cent of the electorate casting a vote, the referendum truly was an exercise in self-

determination. The outcome confirms the point that self-determination also implies the right not to separate, as the Scots have chosen, at least for now. Under working-class rule, resolution of the various national questions in Britain and Ireland would be relatively easily achieved. Our programme is for a federation of workers republics in the British Isles.

* * *

As the 18 September Scottish referendum approaches, polls indicate that a majority might vote yes. A vote for independence is the last thing Prime Minister David Cameron expected when he agreed to the referendum two years ago. For several years, around a third of the population of Scotland supported independence. But the attitude of the English bourgeoisie towards Scotland, which lies somewhere between contempt and hatred, has driven more Scottish people towards separation. The more the London government issues dire warnings against Scottish independence, the more the polls swing towards a yes vote. By now Cameron can barely show his face in Scotland for fear of driving even more people into the independence camp.

The Tories had precious little support in Scotland to begin with—the party famously has fewer Scottish Members of Parliament than there are giant pandas in Edinburgh Zoo—that is, one Tory MP to two pandas. Much more significant in terms of the outcome of the referendum is the Labour Party’s refusal to offer any meaningful opposition to Tory attacks on welfare and to the privatisation of the National Health Service. Obviously, the Tories can’t win Scotland, but they might help lose it for Labour, the party with the largest number of Scottish MPs in Westminster. Labour’s accommodation to Tory austerity may well be the deciding factor in the outcome of the referendum.

The pro-UK “Better Together” campaign is a hapless coalition of Tories, Liberal Democrats and Labour. Its chief spokesman, Labour’s Alistair Darling, was Chancellor of the Exchequer during the 2008 banking crisis. Darling negotiated a bailout for Britain’s colossal banking sector, for which Britain’s working people have been forced to pay ever since.

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Tory prime minister David Cameron stoked English chauvinism immediately following referendum. Right: Bigots waving Union Jack gave Nazi-style salute, went on rampage in Glasgow, September 19.

