



# Class-Struggle Road to Black Freedom

We print below a presentation, edited for publication, given to a Spartacist League meeting in New York City this summer by Workers Vanguard Editorial Board member Paul Cone.

With Martin Luther King Jr. all the rage these days, I thought I'd open with Malcolm X's rejoinder to King's "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington. In addition to earlier calling the March a farce, Malcolm said: "I'm one of the 22 million black people who

## PART ONE

## The Roots of Black Oppression

are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are the victims of democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy.... I don't see any American dream; I see an American nightmare" ("The Ballot or the Bullet," 3 April 1964). Fifty-one years later, for the ghetto masses that nightmare has only gotten more terrifying.

The roll call of recent victims of racist cop terror is well known: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland and now 19-year-old college football player Christian Taylor to name *just a bare few*. Taylor, a Black Lives Matter activist, presciently tweeted last year: "Police taking black lives as easy as flippin a coin, with no consequences."

The explosions of outrage following the police strangulation of Eric Garner in Staten Island, the gunning down of black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson and the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore have triggered in the capitalist ruling class some post-traumatic stress disorder flashbacks to the hundreds of ghetto

**Spartacist banner at "Millions March NYC" demonstration against racist police killings, 13 December 2014.**

upsurges between 1964-68. Compared to the flames that engulfed Watts, Newark, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Cleveland and many other cities at that time, the past year's events could be characterized as bonfires. However, in mobilizing the National Guard, enacting draconian curfews and brutalizing and arresting protesters, the capitalist rulers express their apprehension that everyday cop terror, grinding oppression and poverty have built up enormous social tinder that could ignite in a broader social explosion.

Our comrades joined protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston and elsewhere, highlighting our class opposition to the racist Democratic Party of Obama/Clinton and combating illusions expressed in calls for federal oversight, "community control" of the police, and civilian review boards, whose role has always been to whitewash the killers in uniform. Notable was the occasional utterance of the epithet "white skin privilege" in attempts to silence our Marxist intervention.

Some younger comrades, though familiar with other methods of anti-communist censorship, had not been acquainted with

what we older folk thought was a relic of the New Left of the 1960s-70s. Apparently, "white skin privilege" has become a regular feature of college curricula, radical-liberal conferences and the blogosphere. Now the term is even used in the mainstream media. "Privilege checking" has become one of the latest additions to the dictionary of political correctness. In early July, for example, the *New York Times* website ran a short documentary, *A Conversation with White People on Race*. One woman's comment was representative: "I think we are all implicated in a racist system, and I play my part in it as a white person. So I do have individual responsibility and accountability."

This increasingly common view flips the matter on its head. Prejudice is not the cause of black oppression; rather, the capitalist rulers' special oppression of black people, integral to American capitalism, fosters anti-black discrimination. What she expressed is the smoke and mirrors by which the capitalists throw the responsibility for the oppression of black people upon the population as a whole—if white people weren't preju-

diced, there would be no problem. In the 1950s and '60s, this refrain was common to the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations, which cautioned civil rights activists to "go slow" in pushing for change, claiming the need to patiently win over the hearts of segregationists.

For those like Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Ted Allen, who around 50 years ago advanced "white skin privilege" theory while professing adherence (albeit tenuous) to Marxist revolutionary politics, the white working class was seen as materially benefiting from black oppression and to have a vested interest in perpetuating anti-black hostility. Ignatin & Co. eschewed any prospect of integrated struggle to further the common interests of black and white workers and dismissed the unions, which are the basic defense organizations of the working class, as bourgeois institutions—a way of making common cause with the class enemy. Similarly, they declared the Soviet Union (a workers state, although bureaucratically degenerated) to be capitalist, thereby writing it off and aligning themselves with their own imperialist masters.

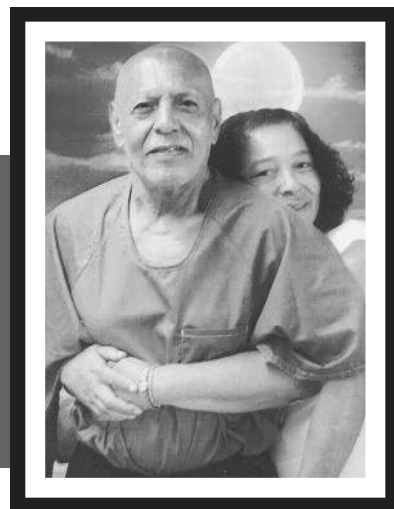
The theory of "white skin privilege" serves only to conceal that *the oppression of black people persists because it is a key*

*continued on page 8*

## Unbroken and Unbowed Fighter for the Oppressed

## Hugo Pinell Assassinated

See article on page 6



# “Karl Marx” by V.I. Lenin

We print below the first section of “Karl Marx,” written by Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin for a popular Russian encyclopedia in 1914 (not 1913 as Lenin mistakenly recalled in his 1918 preface). The biographical sketch below will be followed in future issues of *Workers Vanguard* by the rest of the work, which provides a basic introduction to key aspects of Marxism, including philosophy, economics and the class struggle. The translation is reprinted from the *Collected Works of Lenin* (Progress Publishers).

## PART ONE

### Preface

This article on Karl Marx, which now appears in a separate printing, was written in 1913 (as far as I can remember) for the *Granat Encyclopaedia*. A fairly detailed bibliography of literature on Marx, mostly foreign, was appended to the article. This has been omitted in the present edition. The editors of the *Encyclopaedia*, for their part, have, for censorship reasons, deleted the end of the article on Marx, namely, the section dealing with his revolutionary tactics. Unfortunately, I am unable to reproduce that end, because the draft has remained among my papers somewhere in Cracow or in Switzerland. I only remember that in the concluding part of the article I quoted, among other things, the passage from Marx’s letter to Engels of April 16, 1856, in which he wrote: “The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasant War. Then the affair will be splendid.” That is what our Mensheviks, who have now sunk to utter betrayal of socialism and to desertion to the bourgeoisie, have failed to understand since 1905.

\* \* \*

Marx, Karl, was born on May 5, 1818 (New Style), in the city of Trier (Rhenish Prussia). His father was a lawyer, a Jew, who in 1824 adopted Protestantism. The family was well-to-do, cultured, but not revolutionary. After graduating from a *Gymnasium* [high school] in Trier, Marx entered the university, first at Bonn and later in Berlin, where he read law, majoring in history and philosophy. He concluded his university course in 1841, submitting a doctoral thesis on the philosophy of Epicurus. At the time Marx was a Hegelian idealist in his views. In Berlin, he belonged to the circle of “Left Hegelians” (Bruno Bauer and others) who sought to draw atheistic and revolutionary conclusions from Hegel’s philosophy.

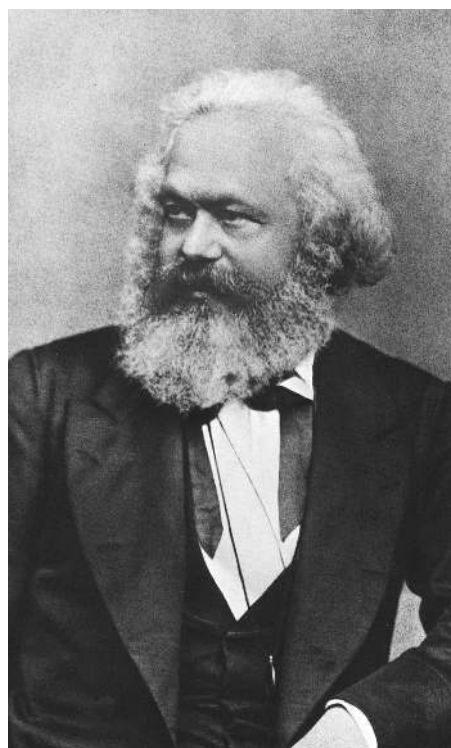
After graduating, Marx moved to Bonn, hoping to become a professor. However,

the reactionary policy of the government, which deprived Ludwig Feuerbach of his chair in 1832, refused to allow him to return to the university in 1836, and in 1841 forbade young Professor Bruno Bauer to lecture at Bonn, made Marx abandon the idea of an academic career. Left Hegelian views were making rapid headway in Germany at the time. Ludwig Feuerbach began to criticise theology, particularly after 1836, and turn to materialism, which in 1841 gained the ascendancy in his philosophy (*The Essence of Christianity*). The year 1843 saw the appearance of his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. “One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect” of these books, Engels subsequently wrote of these works of Feuerbach. “We [i.e., the Left Hegelians, including Marx] all became at once Feuerbachians.” At that time, some radical bourgeois in the Rhineland, who were in touch with the Left Hegelians, founded, in Cologne, an opposition paper called *Rheinische Zeitung* (The first issue appeared on January 1, 1842). Marx and Bruno Bauer were invited to be the chief contributors, and in October 1842 Marx became editor-in-chief and moved from Bonn to Cologne. The newspaper’s revolutionary-democratic trend became more and more pronounced under Marx’s editorship, and the government first imposed double and triple censorship on the paper, and then on January 1, 1843, decided to suppress it. Marx had to resign the editorship before that date, but his resignation did not save the paper, which suspended publication in March 1843. Of the major articles Marx contributed to *Rheinische Zeitung*, Engels notes, in addition to those indicated below (see *Bibliography*), an article on the condition of peasant vine-growers in the Moselle Valley. Marx’s journalistic activities convinced him that he was insufficiently acquainted with political economy, and he zealously set out to study it.

In 1843, Marx married, at Kreuznach, Jenny von Westphalen, a childhood friend he had become engaged to while still a student. His wife came of a reactionary family of the Prussian nobility, her elder brother being Prussia’s Minister of the Interior during a most reactionary period—1850-58. In the autumn of 1843, Marx went to Paris in order to publish a radical journal abroad, together with Arnold Ruge (1802-1880; Left Hegelian; in prison in 1825-30; a political exile following 1848, and a Bismarckian after 1866-70). Only one issue of this journal, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, appeared; publication was discontinued owing to the difficulty of secretly distributing it in Germany, and to disagreement with Ruge. Marx’s articles in this journal showed that he was already a revolution-

ary, who advocated “merciless criticism of everything existing,” and in particular the “criticism by weapon,” and appealed to the *masses* and to the *proletariat*.

In September 1844 Frederick Engels came to Paris for a few days, and from that time on became Marx’s closest friend. They both took a most active part in the then seething life of the revolutionary groups in Paris (of particular importance at the time was [the anarchist Pierre-Joseph] Proudhon’s doctrine, which Marx pulled to pieces in his *Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847); waging a vigorous struggle



John Mayall

Karl Marx, 1872.

against the various doctrines of petty-bourgeois socialism, they worked out the theory and tactics of revolutionary *proletarian socialism*, or communism (Marxism). See Marx’s works of this period, 1844-48, in the *Bibliography*. At the insistent request of the Prussian Government, Marx was banished from Paris in 1845, as a dangerous revolutionary. He went to Brussels. In the spring of 1847 Marx and Engels joined a secret propaganda society called the Communist League; they took a prominent part in the League’s Second Congress (London, November 1847), at whose request they drew up the celebrated *Communist Manifesto*, which appeared in February 1848. With the clarity and brilliance of genius, this work outlines a new world-conception, consistent materialism, which also embraces the realm of social life; dialectics, as the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development; the theory of the class struggle and of the world-historic revolutionary role of the proletariat—the creator of a new, communist society.

On the outbreak of the Revolution of February 1848, Marx was banished from Belgium. He returned to Paris, whence, after the March Revolution, he went to Cologne, Germany, where *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was published from June 1, 1848 to May 19, 1849, with Marx as editor-in-chief. The new theory was splendidly confirmed by the course of the revolutionary events of 1848-49, just as it has been subsequently confirmed by all proletarian and democratic movements in all countries of the world. The victorious counter-revolutionaries first instigated court proceedings against Marx (he was acquitted on February 9, 1849), and then banished him from Germany (May 16, 1849). First Marx went to Paris, was again banished after the demonstration of June 13, 1849, and then went to London,

where he lived till his death.

His life as a political exile was a very hard one, as the correspondence between Marx and Engels (published in 1913) clearly reveals. Poverty weighed heavily on Marx and his family; had it not been for Engels’s constant and selfless financial aid, Marx would not only have been unable to complete *Capital* but would have inevitably been crushed by want. Moreover, the prevailing doctrines and trends of petty-bourgeois socialism, and of non-proletarian socialism in general, forced Marx to wage a continuous and merciless struggle and sometimes to repel the most savage and monstrous personal attacks (*Herr Vogt*). Marx, who stood aloof from circles of political exiles, developed his materialist theory in a number of historical works (see *Bibliography*), devoting himself mainly to a study of political economy. Marx revolutionised this science (see “The Marxist Doctrine,” below) in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Capital* (Vol. I, 1867).

The revival of the democratic movements in the late fifties and in the sixties recalled Marx to practical activity. In 1864 (September 28) the International Workingmen’s Association—the celebrated First International—was founded in London. Marx was the heart and soul of this organisation, and author of its first Address and of a host of resolutions, declarations and manifestos. In uniting the labour movement of various countries, striving to channel into joint activity the various forms of non-proletarian, pre-Marxist socialism ([Giuseppe] Mazzini, Proudhon, [Mikhail] Bakunin, liberal trade-unionism in Britain, Lassallean vacillations to the right in Germany, etc.), and in combating the theories of all these sects and schools, Marx hammered out a uniform tactic for the proletarian struggle of the working class in the various countries. Following the downfall of the Paris Commune (1871)—of which Marx gave such a profound, clear-cut, brilliant, *effective* and revolutionary analysis (*The Civil War in France*, 1871)—and the Bakuninist-caused cleavage in the International, the latter organisation could no longer exist in Europe. After the Hague Congress of the International (1872), Marx had the General Council of the International transferred to New York. The First International had played its historical part, and now made way for a period of a far greater development of the labour movement in all countries in the world, a period in which the movement grew in *scope*, and *mass* socialist working-class parties in individual national states were formed.

Marx’s health was undermined by his strenuous work in the International and his still more strenuous theoretical occupations. He continued work on the refashioning of political economy and on the completion of *Capital*, for which he collected a mass of new material and studied a number of languages (Russian, for instance). However, ill-health prevented him from completing *Capital*.

His wife died on December 2, 1881, and on March 14, 1883, Marx passed away peacefully in his armchair. He lies buried next to his wife at Highgate Cemetery in London. Of Marx’s children some died in childhood in London, when the family were living in destitute circumstances. Three daughters married English and French socialists: Eleanor Aveling, Laura Lafargue and Jenny Longuet. The latter’s son is a member of the French Socialist Party.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

## WORKERS VANGUARD

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Comrades,

I have been concerned about the direction of SL, ICL-FI writings on the Middle East, specifically ISIS (or ISIL or IS Islamic State). SL initially took the position of military support but no political support of all forces opposing U.S. imperialism. This seems to have evolved into ISIS is the lesser of two evils with copious disclaiming and condemnation of just about everything ISIS does. I think you are asking the wrong question in this situation and getting a very bad answer.

What is, or should be the Marxist Leninist approach? In the First great inter-imperialist war, World War One, the left socialists, which included Lenin, put forward Revolutionary Defeatism. In Russia where the policy succeeded Lenin and the Bolsheviks made very clear before, during, after the revolution that they were *not* agents of Germany, Russia's chief enemy, nor working for a German victory, in fact after the victory of the revolution they had to fight Germany and the other imperialist powers as well. Likewise with World War II the SWP opposed the imperialist war, but they were never agents of the Nazis. The point being that opposing an imperialist power's war does not necessarily mean supporting their opponent. That is two separate questions.

I would say that ISIS is a fascist organization with the particulars that come with having fundamentalist Islam as its ideology. They are the enemy of all socialist movements. It doesn't matter if you regard them as the chief or some second or third rate enemy, they are the enemy. Marxists do not support fascists on any level.

The last time a situation with many similarities to this one came up SL had a different and much better approach. In Iran when the Shah, a client of western imperialists, was overthrown by Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution" SL put forward the slogan "Down with the Shah, down with the mullahs, Workers to power" (or something substantially similar, I don't have it in front of me now). In other words opposition to both the imperialists and the Islamic fascists.

The Kurds. Right now the de facto SL policy for the Kurds is to stand by and

cheer as the Islamic fascists kill them. This is supposedly going to increase the revolutionary potential in the U.S. Actually what it seems to be is an abandonment of any revolutionary perspective for the region and petty bourgeois vindictiveness for a people whose current leadership is a client of imperialism. When ISIS arose they bloodily attacked Shia and Kurdish regions. The Kurds in self defense resisted. The Kurds fought well, but lacked heavy weapons and were threatened with death or expulsion from the country. For their own reasons the U.S. offered arms and tactical air support to the Kurds. The Kurds really had no choice but to accept. Revolutionaries should support the Kurds' defense, but oppose their deployment to other parts of Iraq to support imperialist aims. What should be done is to create a revolutionary Kurdish party to oppose the pro-imperialists. You will never do it with a program that cheers Islamic Fascists as they kill, rape, and dispossess the Kurds in Syria and Iraq.

Remember in these situations, the enemy of my enemy is also my enemy.

For a revolutionary party,  
Loren S.

**WV replies:**

The bottom line of Loren S.'s letter is that ISIS is so abhorrent, so evil, "fascist" as he calls it, that "democratic" U.S. imperialism is preferable to it. In reality, the many gruesome crimes of ISIS pale in comparison to those of the U.S. and other imperialists, whether measured in numbers, reach or impact. The trails of blood that blight the Near East today are consequences of a century of "divide and rule," war and overall economic and social retardation imposed by the imperialist system. ISIS itself grew out of the devastation that followed the 2003 invasion of Iraq as well as the support funneled by the U.S. and its allies to the reactionary forces fighting the brutal bourgeois regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

We take a military side with ISIS when it targets the imperialists and forces acting as their proxies, including the Baghdad government, the Shi'ite militias, the Kurdish *pesh merga* in northern Iraq and the Syrian Kurdish nationalists. At the same time, we are in staunch political opposition

to ISIS, whose bloodthirsty methods and retrograde outlook are truly repugnant.

The bottom line for Marxists is that a setback for the U.S. and its proxies would impede imperialist designs for the region. This could only aid the proletariat and oppressed of the Near East, including the Kurdish masses. Such a setback could also promote domestic opposition to U.S. imperialism among a war-weary populace that has been ground down by years of economic crisis and a “recovery” from which workers haven’t benefited. We Marxists aim to turn the disillusionment and anger of working people in the U.S. into class struggle against the capitalist rulers at home. It is through such struggle that the proletariat will be won to the program of socialist revolution to destroy the imperialist beast from within.

Such a perspective begins with the understanding that the U.S. imperialists are the main enemy of working people throughout the world. This is precisely what Loren rejects. To buttress his argument, he cites a number of examples that have no relation to the issue at hand. The case of Iran in 1978-79 was one of competing bourgeois forces—the Shah and the Islamists—fighting over control of the country amid a situation where the question of a proletarian struggle for power was posed. It was not one where the imperialists waged war against one side or another. The First and Second World Wars were *interimperialist* wars to redive the globe among the “Great Powers.” In such wars, Marxists have a revolutionary defeatist line toward all the belligerents (except for the USSR in World War II, which Marxists unconditionally militarily defended).

And then there's the canard of "Islamic fascists." Loren describes ISIS (as well as the mullahs in Iran and presumably other Islamist forces) as "fascists," writing, "They are the enemy of all socialist movements." So are the bourgeois nationalists and, above all, the imperialists. Yet Loren does not ascribe that label to them. ISIS and other Islamists are no more fascist than are any of the multitudes of reactionary and murderous forces that rule most of this planet. In reality, the term "Islamic fascists" was coined as part of the ideological campaign to jus-

tify the “war on terror.” It serves as a salve for liberals making their peace with U.S. imperialism and lends credence to the bourgeois-democratic veneer of the imperialists. In throwing it around as a sort of curse word, Loren simply reveals how much he imbibes of the democratic pretensions of U.S. imperialism.

But even if ISIS did represent a fascist force, it would not alter our principled position of militarily defending them against imperialism. In 1938, with the Second World War looming, Leon Trotsky addressed a hypothetical attack by “democratic” British imperialism against Brazil, which was then ruled by the fascistic Vargas regime:

"In this case I will be on the side of 'fascist' Brazil against 'democratic' Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy."

—“Anti-Imperialist Struggle Is  
Key to Liberation,”  
23 September 1938

It is telling that in opposing our position, Loren cites only the Kurds; for example, he raises no objection to our line in relation to the Shi'ite militias. The implication is that somehow the Kurdish forces are inherently progressive. Actually, the fighting in Iraq and Syria has seen communalist massacres on all sides; we originally had no side until U.S. imperialism directly intervened. While ISIS revels in its barbarism and brutality, it does not have a monopoly on such qualities among the contending forces in the region. One of the reasons ISIS has been able to find support among Sunni Arabs is that they have faced murderous communalism at the hands of Shi'ite and Kurdish militias—such as the *pesh merga* forces who participated in the U.S.-led 2004 assault

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## Book Launch

# *The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929*

The following is the second part of a May 9 presentation, edited for publication, by Prometheus Research Library associate Jacob A. Zumoff promoting his book *The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929*. The first part of Zumoff's presentation, published in WV No. 1072 (7 August), dealt with the origins of the Communist movement in the U.S. under the impact of the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent struggle for a unified, legal Communist Party (CP).

### PART TWO

Another important intervention by the Comintern was to push the American Communists to take up the fight against black oppression. One of the distinguishing features of capitalism in the United States is that it rests upon black oppression, going back to the colonial period and the institution of slavery. After the Civil War had abolished slavery, the betrayal of Radical Reconstruction—the brief period when former slaves and their allies gained power in the former slave South—led to the consolidation of black people into a race-color caste at the bottom of American society. Only the destruction of



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**Moscow, 1922: Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay speaking on racial oppression in U.S. at Fourth Congress of Communist International.**

among the thousands of founding Communists in 1919. So how did the Communists come to pay attention to the question of black oppression? It was the Comintern, and in the first instance it was Lenin, who pushed the issue and forced the American Communists to come to grips with this key aspect of American society.

In contrast to the American Socialists, the Bolsheviks had long emphasized what they saw as “special oppression”—that is

The birth of the American Communist movement coincided with one of the worst waves of racist violence in American history, what is known as the “Red Summer,” when there were racist pogroms in several cities. It also coincided with the start of what is now called the “Great Migration” from the Jim Crow South. More than a million black people moved from the rural South, both to urban areas in the South and, more importantly, to

Socialist Federation in London. Another example is the Harlem-based radical black nationalist African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). While such black radicals were attracted to Communism, to Bolshevism, they were not attracted to the early Communist Party in the United States, which had almost nothing to say about black oppression.

The Comintern's intervention and forceful insistence on the need to fight for black liberation enabled the CP to recruit most of the leadership of the ABB. Recruiting the ABB gave the Communists a real foothold in Harlem and a base to recruit black workers and intellectuals throughout the North. Without Comintern intervention, it is likely that the ABB never would have joined the Communists. As my book explains, in the late 1920s the particular analysis that the CP brought to the question—the so-called Black Belt theory—was flawed, but during the following decade, the Communists became known for being in the forefront of the fight against black oppression.

### The Farmer-Labor Question, La Follette and Class Independence

What I want to discuss next is the issue of the Farmer-Labor Party. In the United States, unlike much of Europe, the working class traditionally has supported one or another bourgeois party—either the Democrats or the Republicans. In fact, Samuel Gompers and the rest of the American Federation of Labor bureaucracy opposed organizing a working-class party.

Obviously, as I mentioned, there was the Socialist Party in this period, and Socialists had been elected as mayors in several cities, often focusing on municipal reforms. For example, Victor Berger, the supporter of Jim Crow socialism, was elected in Milwaukee because he promised to fix the sewers there. Thus, this municipal reformism is called sewer socialism. And I believe that he did fix the sewers. But the SP was never seen as a threat to the power of the two bourgeois parties in a national sense.

After World War I, amid a brief upturn in class struggle, some trade-union leaders—especially in Chicago, the industrial center of the country—advocated the formation of a labor party, largely influenced by the British Labour Party. The British Labour Party, like the German Social



Library of Congress



Minnesota Historical Society

**Comintern insisted that U.S. Communist Party maintain proletarian class independence rather than tail two-class Farmer-Labor Party and bourgeois-populist Robert La Follette (above left), presidential candidate for Progressive Party, 1924.**

capitalism and the creation of a socialist society can lead to the liberation of black people in the U.S., that is, finishing the tasks of the Civil War.

One of the biggest historical failings of American Social Democracy—its left wing included—was its position on black oppression. There were some prominent Socialists, like Victor Berger of Milwaukee, who were outright racists and actually held that socialism would be segregated. There were others, for example, left-wing Socialist leader Eugene Debs, who were not racists. Debs in fact wrote forcefully against racism, but his approach, what we could call color blindness, was basically that white workers and black workers should get together, unite and fight. Debs said, “We have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races.” His conclusion was that, “The Socialist Party is the party of the working class, regardless of color—the whole working class of the whole world.” While he was anti-racist, this color-blind approach did not appreciate or understand the special role of black oppression in American capitalism.

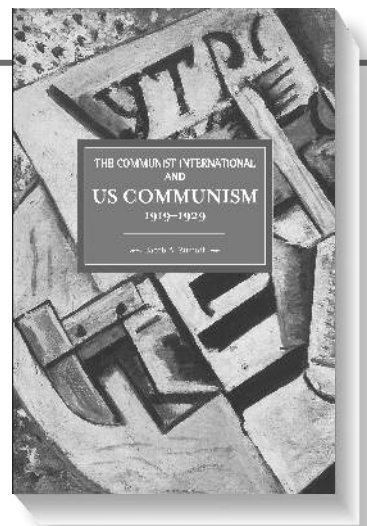
This color blindness was inherited by the early American Communists. For instance, there was only one black person

to say, oppression that was not just reducible to class exploitation. In his seminal work *What Is To Be Done?* [1902], Lenin had argued that the revolutionary party must be a “tribune of the people,” fighting against all forms of oppression and linking these fights to the struggle for proletarian power. Lenin called tsarist Russia the “prison house of peoples” and saw that the Bolshevik Party needed to fight against the oppression of the myriad national and ethnic groups by Great Russian chauvinism.

From this revolutionary internationalist perspective, the Comintern essentially *forced* American Communists to take up what was then called the “Negro question.” To give a concrete example, at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, Lenin made John Reed give a report on this issue. In Reed's papers at Harvard, I found that Reed wanted to give a report on the trade-union question and wrote to Lenin, asking: is it really important that I give a report on the black question? Lenin wrote back two words: “Absolutely necessary.” So, this intervention by the Comintern, by foreigners as it were, seeded the ground for Communists to begin the work of recruiting radical black workers and intellectuals, something that would flower later on.

cities in the North such as Chicago and New York. There, black people faced the racial oppression inherent in American capitalism, but they also began a process of becoming integrated into the working class, albeit paid less, treated worse, and the last hired and the first fired. In New York and elsewhere, these migrants from the South were joined by black immigrants from British and other European colonies in the Caribbean. This contributed to the development of what was known as the “New Negro” movement, which was in favor of self-defense against racist violence and oppression. This movement was contradictory, encompassing black nationalists, integrationists and people of various other types.

The Bolshevik Revolution had a big impact on many in the ghettos, from Harlem to the South Side of Chicago and elsewhere. The Bolsheviks' open hatred of imperialism and colonial oppression, including their demand for the independence of oppressed colonies, attracted many black intellectuals, especially those from the Caribbean. One of the more famous of the “New Negroes” to be attracted to Bolshevism was Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay, who had been active around Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers



*The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929*  
by Jacob A. Zumoff

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Democratic Party, was what can be called a bourgeois labor party or a bourgeois workers party—it had a working-class base but a bourgeois program and leadership. Such parties represent in the political arena the division of society between workers and capitalists, albeit in a crude way. In the United States, the formation of a labor party would have represented an advance in the consciousness of the working class.

Focused on their belief that revolution was near, the early Communists were hostile to this labor party movement. Americanizers such as James P. Cannon, as well as the Comintern, fought to get the CP to intervene into this movement in order to polarize it between revolutionaries and reformists. But by the time the American Communists as a whole began to pay attention in 1922, the labor party movement had changed. It had become a *farmer-labor* party in an attempt to attract agrarian radicals. Thus, it became a two-class party, one that claimed to be based on both the working class and small farmers, that is, a section of the petty bourgeoisie. So, rather than increase class consciousness among workers, this concept weakened it.

A Leninist intervention into the farmer-labor movement would have drawn a clear *class* line and fought for a working-class party, separate from bourgeois reformers and not subordinate to farmers. Instead, American Communists tried to get rich quick through a series of organizational maneuvers. They formed their own Federated Farmer-Labor Party, splitting with their former allies in the trade-union movement. The new party was based on the same two-class program; the only difference was that the Communists were in control. This move was adventurist—it was based on the idea that there was going to be a massive upsurge in agrarian radicalism. It was also opportunist—it jettisoned sections of the Communist program, sometimes explicitly, for example dropping opposition to Jim Crow segregation. At the same time it was sectarian—it alienated a huge section of the trade-union bureaucracy, not on the basis of politics but on tactics. It backfired—the trade-union bureaucracy, including many bureaucrats who had previously tended to be sympathetic, went on a witchhunt and purged Communists from the unions.

The section of the Communist leadership with the most experience in the trade unions—Cannon and William Z. Foster—thought that this maneuver was folly. And this dispute was the beginning of a long-lasting factional division in the party, with C.E. Ruthenberg on one side and Cannon and Foster on the other. Now, added into the mix was one of the most colorful characters in American Communist history, somebody who went by the name of John Pepper. I won't be able to give justice to him. He was a native of Hungary and his given name was József Pogány. He played a key role in leading the 1919 Hungarian Revolution to defeat and his second act was helping to organize the disastrous "March Action" in Germany in 1921. By then he had thoroughly alienated his higher-ups in Moscow, who sent him to the United States.

From what I was able to determine, Pepper was sent to America to work with the Hungarian language federation, a medium-sized language federation. One of its largest locals was in Passaic, New Jersey. His actual assignment, I think, was to edit their newspaper. But he was able to pass himself off as an official emissary from the Comintern, got himself elected to the Central Committee and quickly became not only the intellectual leader of the Ruthenberg group, but soon of the party as a whole. Keep in mind that he didn't speak English when he first came here. The fact that he was able to do all of this speaks to the importance and the esteem that American Communists placed in the Comintern. It also speaks to the theoretical weakness of the early American Communist movement.

Pepper was the most enthusiastic supporter of the farmer-labor perspective. And one of his genuine skills, I sup-



RGASPI

**Left: James P. Cannon with Red Army soldiers at time of 1928 Sixth Comintern Congress, where he was won to Trotskyism. Cannon was expelled from Communist Party for supporting Leon Trotsky (right) in fight for genuine communism against Stalinism.**



Jean Weinberg

pose, was the ability to make a betrayal of Marxism—tying the proletarian vanguard to the petty-bourgeoisie through a two-class party—seem like the pinnacle of Bolshevism.

With the 1924 presidential elections approaching, the broader farmer-labor movement was soon eclipsed by enthusiasm for longtime Wisconsin Republican Senator Robert La Follette. The same people who, a year earlier, had supported the farmer-labor party were now supporting La Follette. In a broad sense, this wasn't really a contradiction, since the farmer-labor movement was essentially an attempt to engage in bourgeois pressure politics. There was quite a lot of angst about the fact that there was tremendous corruption and that big business was obviously running the government.

La Follette was an anti-Communist; he did not even want to form a new capitalist party, but sought merely to pressure the two main parties. This should have served as a warning for Communists of

fact, the Socialist Party essentially did liquidate into the La Follette movement and didn't run a candidate.

In 1924, in Moscow, there was a special American Commission to debate this issue. This commission comprised very important Comintern leaders: Zinoviev, Radek, Lozovsky (who was a key Stalin supporter), Trotsky and Kamenev. This heavy-duty commission was convened because, unknown to most of the American leaders, the La Follette debate intersected a major struggle in the Bolshevik Party. Stalin, then allied with Zinoviev, was seeking to consolidate his power, based on the growing Soviet bureaucracy, within the Russian party after Lenin's death. As part of this struggle, the Stalin faction resurrected the Menshevik idea that socialists should systematically collaborate with non-working-class forces.

Trotsky, who by this time was in opposition to much of the leadership of the Russian party, opposed the La Follette maneuver as a betrayal. He warned: "For

quite frequently to sections of the left in subsequent decades).

## Stalinist Degeneration

I want to talk now about the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern and of the Communist movement. By 1924, there had been a political counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, as a bureaucratic caste headed by Stalin came to power. After January 1924, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled, and the purposes for which the USSR were ruled had all changed. The ideological expression of this was so-called "socialism in one country," the idea that it was possible to build socialism (a society of material abundance based on the highest level of productive technology and an international division of labor) in a backward, largely peasant, country surrounded by hostile imperialist powers. Trotsky, right up through his exile in the late 1920s and his assassination in 1940 by a Stalinist agent, waged a battle, as uncompromising as any waged by Lenin, to reforge a communist vanguard and to oppose the Stalinists while at the same time standing for unconditional military defense of the USSR against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution.

The degeneration of the Soviet workers state and the Bolshevik Party was reflected in the Comintern and the rest of the international Communist movement. This was certainly true in the American CP and I describe the process in several chapters in my book. Today, I want to touch on only a few points. First, the significance of the Stalinist degeneration was not immediately clear to most Communists, especially those far away from Russia. Second, the rise of Stalinism within the American CP, while reflecting the intervention of the Comintern, also reflected homegrown political problems. Finally, I want to make the point that Stalinism was *fought* in the American Communist Party.

What Stalinism represented was not clear in 1924. Many American Communists would not even have recognized Stalin, and the early stages of Stalinization were spearheaded by Zinoviev, not by Stalin. The rise of Stalinization coincided with several problems in the American party. The factionalism that had begun over the farmer-labor party was blossoming into full-fledged warfare, at times threatening the basic unity of the party. Even after Pepper had been sent back to Moscow, Ruthenberg, assisted by his lieutenant Jay Lovestone, maintained one faction; Foster, assisted by Earl Browder and others, had his faction; and Cannon had his own faction.

In the mid to late 1920s, this factionalism had become devoid of any apparent political rationale. At the same time the party was regaining some of its momentum and once again becoming a factor in the broader labor movement. So, to give two examples: in 1926-27, the party led a militant textile workers strike in Passaic, New Jersey, and in 1927 the party's International Labor Defense (led by Cannon) fought to save anarchist prisoners

*continued on page 7*



Labor Defender

**Comintern was crucial in orienting American Communists to combat black oppression. In 1930s, Communist Party played key role in campaign that saved the Scottsboro Nine from legal lynching.**

the danger of not insisting on the political independence of the working class. Instead, led by Pepper, the Communists were drawn closer into La Follette's orbit. Pepper hailed what he called the "La Follette revolution," which, he wrote, would comprise "elements of the great French Revolution, and the Russian Kersensky Revolution." He expanded: "In its ideology it will have elements of Jeffersonianism, Danish cooperatives, Ku Klux Klan and Bolshevism" but he did concede, "The proletariat *as a class* will not play an independent role in this revolution." He advocated "support to the La Follette revolution at the same time criticizing and fighting for a Communist mass party."

Pepper came up with what he called the "theory of two splits." First, the nascent third-party movement would split the petty bourgeoisie from the big capitalists, and then the Communists would split the proletariat from the petty bourgeoisie. This would have been political suicide for the Communist Party. It would have meant liquidating the party into the reformist swamp, politically undoing the whole 1919 split of the Communists from the reformist betrayers of socialism. In

a young and weak Communist Party, lacking in revolutionary temper, to play the role of solicitor and gatherer of 'progressive' votes for the Republican Senator La Follette is to head toward the political dissolution of the party in the petty bourgeoisie."

Although the "triumvirate" of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin was in a position of strength, they still felt compelled to concede to Trotsky. Thus, the Comintern instructed the American party to break with the La Follette movement, to denounce him and to stand its own candidate. The party ran Foster for president in 1924. He did not receive many votes, but he drew a hard class line between the Communists and bourgeois populism.

The Comintern's intervention confused many American Communists. It came very late in the day and caused the Communists to pivot on a dime, rather clumsily. But it underscores how important the Comintern was at this point in guiding American Communism *politically* in maintaining the principle of working-class independence. Without the Comintern's intervention, the party would have become a tail on bourgeois electoral formations (something that has happened



# Hugo Pinell Assassinated

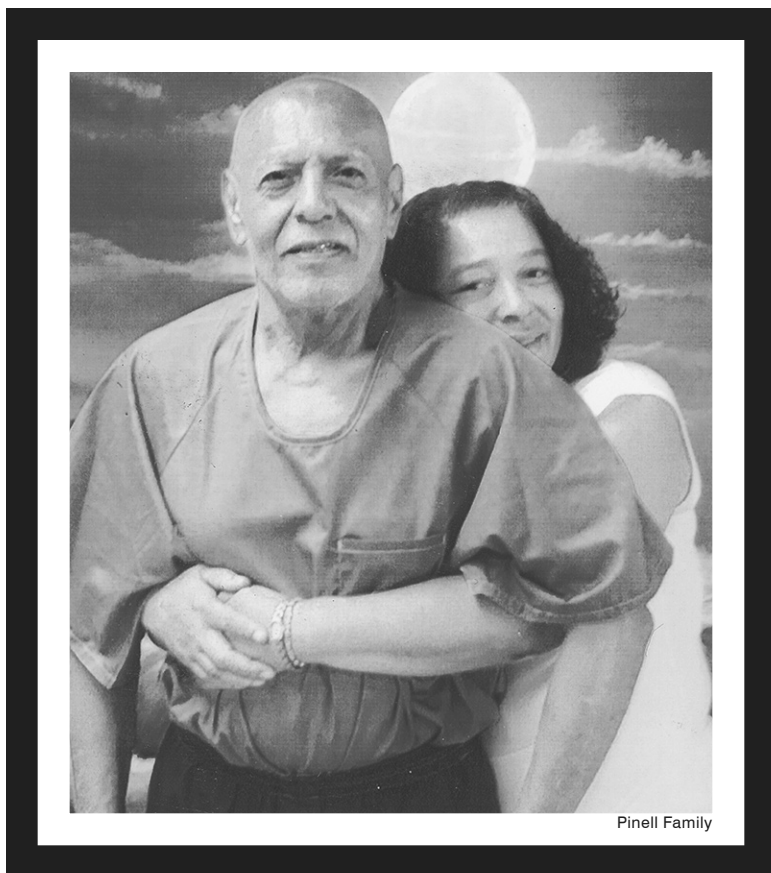
Class-war prisoner Hugo Pinell was a marked man. Since the late 1960s when he emerged as a leader of the prisoners' rights movement together with his mentor and comrade, George Jackson, Pinell was on the hit list of the state and its sadistic prison guards. Brutalized and tortured, the target of repeated assassination attempts, *Pinell was held in solitary confinement for more than 40 years*. But he would not be broken. Despite being locked in a tiny cell for 23 hours a day, Pinell continued to struggle against the horrors of America's prisons. In 2011 and 2013 he joined thousands of other inmates in hunger strikes against the dehumanizing torture of solitary confinement. The hunger strikes were initiated by prisoners in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) at California's notorious Pelican Bay "supermax" prison where Pinell had been locked up since 1990.

In late July, Pinell, aged 71, was released into the general prison population at California State Prison-Sacramento (aka New Folsom). Two weeks later, on August 12, he was killed in the prison yard, allegedly stabbed to death by two inmates. Whoever wielded the knife it was his jailers who wanted him dead. Prison guards gloated on social media over Pinell's murder while the capitalist rulers' hired pens and media mouthpieces slandered him as a "notorious killer."

Pinell was the last member of the San Quentin 6 still in prison. The six were framed up on charges stemming from the prison upheaval sparked by the assassination of Black Panther Party member George Jackson by guards in August 1971. In a statement honoring their fallen comrade Pinell, three members of the San Quentin 6—Willie Tate, Luis Talamantez and David Johnson—wrote: "We must expose those who under the cover of law orchestrated and allowed this murderous act to take place." We stand with them in protesting Pinell's murder, seeking to expose the state forces that stand behind it and honoring his unbreakable courage and commitment to the struggle against the barbarism of the American prison system. We also share the sorrow and tremendous sense of loss felt by Pinell's mother Marina whose love preserved him, his daughter Allegra and the rest of his family.

Since 1986, Pinell, affectionately known as "Yogi Bear," was a recipient of the Partisan Defense Committee's monthly stipends to those imprisoned for fighting against the brutal class exploitation and racial oppression that define capitalist

## Unbroken and Unbowed Fighter for the Oppressed



Hugo Pinell with his daughter Allegra, New Folsom State Prison, August 5.

rule. Not an act of charity but of solidarity, the purpose of the PDC stipend program is to keep the cause of these prisoners alive outside the prison walls. In his greetings to the 2009 annual PDC Holiday Appeal for Class-War Prisoners, Pinell wrote:

"In February 2010 it will be 45 years in the California Department of Corrections (CDC) on an original sentence of 18 months! My S.Q. 6 assault conviction has become a 'buried alive sentence' and, as unjust and brutal their actions, let me remain positive and reassuring over the great lessons and experiences in my journey. I came in a juvenile delinquent, a common criminal. Thanks to Beautiful People, i awakened, i have grown and transformed into a humble freedom Servant.... Your care and solidarity has provided me with extra strength and drive to keep on pushing and evolving and i hope that my company has served you well."

The killing of Hugo Pinell is a blow to all fighters against racial injustice and oppression. At the same time, his story has many lessons to carry that battle forward.

### A Fighter Forged in a Prison Inferno

Born in Nicaragua, Pinell moved to the U.S. when he was 12 years old. In 1964, at just 19, he was accused of raping a white woman, a charge he always adamantly denied. Despite his innocence, Pinell's mother was pressured into believing that if he didn't plead guilty he would be sentenced to death. Promised eligibility for parole after six months of a three-year sentence, Pinell copped a plea. When he got to prison, however, he learned that his sentence was three years to life.

Amid the degradation of prison life, Pinell was introduced to the politics of the radical struggles for black rights by militant black prisoner W.L. Nolen in 1967. As Pinell wrote in a letter to a friend: "Most of us were very young, doing short sentences (supposedly), had been through the gladiator stations, Tracy and Soledad, and the time and place was right for self-

change...to join the liberation movement we had to understand the meaning of liberate and, to embark, on a commitment to freedom, we had to do away with old ways, old habits, f---d up mentality, the club, homeboy set mentality and attitude."

When prison guards inflamed racial hostility between prisoners at Soledad in the summer of 1969, Nolen launched civil rights lawsuits against the warden, the California Department of Corrections and several of the guards. In January 1970, the guards orchestrated a melee between black and white prisoners in the yard. A prison guard sharpshooter in the tower gunned down Nolen and two of his comrades. Pinell was among the first to file a legal protest against the Department of Corrections for this bloodbath.

After the guard who killed Nolen and the two others was exonerated on the

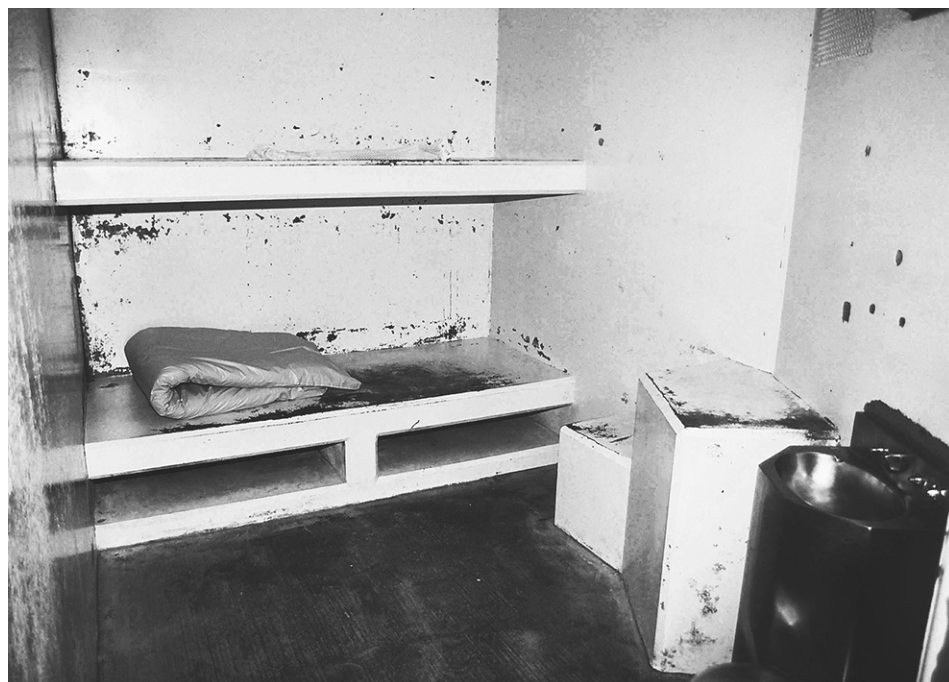
grounds of "justifiable homicide," prisoners erupted in outrage. A white guard was killed and George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Cluchette were framed up on murder charges. Their case, which exposed the sadistic brutality directed against black prisoners, including a series of murders of militants, became widely known with the publication of George Jackson's prison letters in the book *Soledad Brother* (1970). Pinell refused an offer of early parole promised if he gave false testimony against George Jackson.

In their struggle against the racist hell of "life" inside prison, Pinell, Jackson and others reflected the mass social struggles that were taking place outside, from the Black Power movement to the protests against the Vietnam War. At the same time, their institutional concentration and extreme oppression provided a material basis for coming to understand such racial injustice from a *social* rather than individual viewpoint.

Black Panthers, war resisters and other militants provided a transmission belt for radical politics, often an eclectic mixture of Marx and Mao, Lenin and Franz Fanon, into the prisons. Young black and Latino lumpen criminals were inspired to become avowed humanitarians, freedom fighters and revolutionaries with all the contradictions that entailed. As Jackson wrote in *Soledad Brother*: "I met Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Engels and Mao when I entered prison and they redeemed me." Together with a deepening political awareness, their lives developed discipline and focus. Jackson and Pinell especially stood out for struggling to overcome the murderous racial hostilities between black and Latino prisoners fomented by the guards to maintain control. The prospect of interracial solidarity evoked particular fear and hatred from the prison masters, who struck back with a vengeance.

Amid the tumultuous social struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the prison guards and their masters did not want George Jackson to get his "day in court," fearing it could serve as a potential platform for exposing the racist depravity of their prisons. On 21 August 1971, two days before the opening of the Soledad Brothers' trial, Jackson was gunned down by guards who claimed he was trying to escape. Prisoners were enraged by Jackson's killing and a melee erupted, in which three guards and two inmate trustees were killed and three other guards wounded.

As a result, Hugo Pinell and five other inmates—the San Quentin 6—were framed up on charges of murder and conspiracy. It was the longest trial in California history, costing millions of



Solitary cell in Pelican Bay prison's Security Housing Unit. Pinell was active in fight against torture of solitary confinement.

**Partisan Defense Committee**  
**CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES**  
Number 38 50¢ Winter 2013-2014

**Free the Class-War Prisoners!**

Top: Hugo Pinell, Willie Tate, David Johnson, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, John Cluchette, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, John Cluchette, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, John Cluchette. Bottom: Leonard Foster, John Tucker, Hugo Pinell, David Attie and Juan Llanusa.

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dollars. The shackled prisoners were led into court leashed like animals and handcuffed to special chairs bolted to the floor. When the trial ended on 12 August 1976, Pinell and David Johnson were convicted of assault; Johnny Spain was convicted of two counts of murder.

Pinell was killed 39 years to the day after his conviction and three years to the day after the California prisoners’ Agreement to End Hostilities that was coauthored by black, Latino and white inmates, a cause for which Pinell’s decades of struggle were an inspiration.

### Prison Guards: The “Worst of the Worst”

Revolts by prisoners against the conditions of their incarceration challenge a key institution of capitalist state repression. Thus, the multiracial 1971 Attica, New York, prison rebellion that was sparked by Jackson’s murder, combined with the prospect of interracial unity exemplified by Jackson and Pinell, drove the state authorities into a murderous rage. Declaring the Attica revolt “a serious threat to the ability of a free government to preserve order,” New York governor Nelson Rockefeller massacred the prisoners as mercilessly as forces hired by his grandfather had murdered striking coal miners in Ludlow, Colorado in 1914.

The same year as the Attica revolt, in the aftermath of the ghetto upheavals



Bettmann

**George Jackson, Pinell’s comrade and mentor, assassinated by prison guards in August 1971.**

of the 1960s, President Richard Nixon launched a “war against crime” that was aimed at black militants and the inner city poor. Two years later, Governor Rockefeller enacted draconian drug laws which became the model for the “war on drugs” that went into high gear in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan, alongside increasing deindustrialization.

Having created the conditions in which more and more black and Latino youth were condemned to joblessness and poverty, the rulers branded them criminal outlaws. By 2010, the prison population in the U.S. was 2.3 million, the majority black and Latino. America came to lead the world in the percentage of its population that is behind bars, with California leading the nation.

Among the biggest beneficiaries were the prison guards. In the past 30 years, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) has grown by a factor of six and their pay more than tripled. The most powerful lobbying force in the state, the CCPOA has poured millions into backing harsher sentencing laws and into measures to defeat attempts to alleviate prison conditions.

The murder of Hugo Pinell came while prisoners have been pursuing a class action suit against California’s notorious solitary confinement torture chambers. The attention drawn to the unspeakable conditions in the SHUs by the courageous prison hunger strikers has already led to some minimal, face-saving measures. Recently some 1,000 prisoners have been released from SHUs into the general prison population. Yet two days after Pinell was assassinated, an Associated Press article proclaimed: “California’s efforts to ease its famously harsh use of solitary confinement are clashing with a bloody reality after an inmate who spent decades alone in a tiny cell was sent back to the general population and killed by fellow inmates within days.”

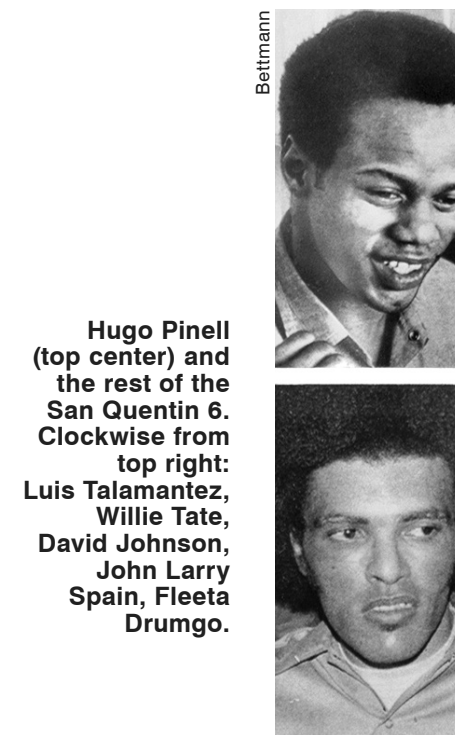
It’s a win-win for the prison guards: a man they have wanted dead for decades was assassinated and his murder has the additional benefit of potentially preserving their jobs as the SHU overseers. As the *San Francisco BayView* (14 August) noted in commemorating Pinell:

“He was no threat to other prisoners. It was the guards who loathed him and loath the Agreement to End Hostilities, which he exemplified and set in motion over 40 years ago.

intern was essentially picking the party’s leadership. First, the Comintern put control of the party in the hands of Ruthenberg and Lovestone, who became the head of Ruthenberg’s old faction after Ruthenberg died. Then, when Lovestone became too bothersome for even Stalin, the Comintern put the leadership in the hands of Earl Browder, who was in Foster’s faction.

There is also a tendency by many leftists to lay all the blame for the degeneration of the CP at the feet of Moscow—see Dan La Botz’s references to so-called Moscow domination. While Moscow definitely played a key role, not everything came from the Comintern—the pressures of American imperialism contributed to many early Communists giving up on their original goal. For example, the La Follette fiasco, notwithstanding the help from Pepper, was thought up by American Communists. And in fact, in much of the 1930s and 1940s, by which time the Communist Party had become Stalinist, there were many similarities between American social democracy and American Stalinism: both supported President Roosevelt’s New Deal, both alibied the trade-union bureaucrats in the CIO, and, by and large, both became enthusiastic supporters of U.S. imperialism in the Second World War.

Besides creating a compliant leadership, the Stalinized Comintern’s main contribution to this process was the ideology of socialism in one country, which was a betrayal of the Comintern’s original proletarian internationalism. This gave a political cover to the anti-revolutionary impulses of much of the American party’s



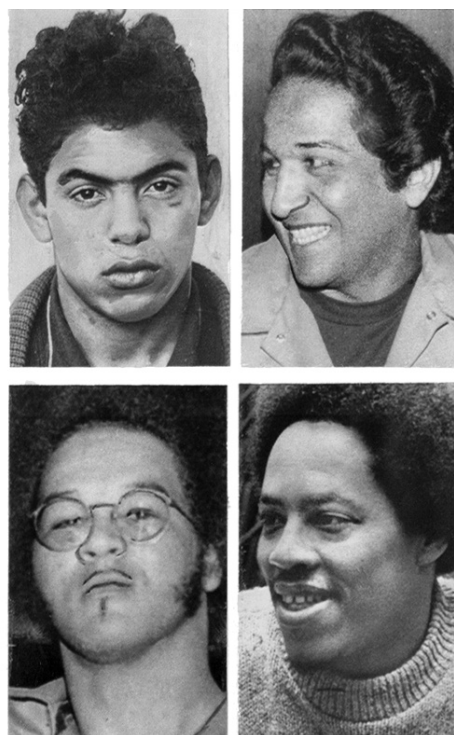
**Hugo Pinell (top center) and the rest of the San Quentin 6. Clockwise from top right: Luis Talamantez, Willie Tate, David Johnson, John Larry Spain, Fleeta Drumgo.**

### Abolish the Prisons! For a Socialist America!

The prisons are the concentrated expression of the depravity of American capitalist society. They are a key instrument to coerce, torture and brutalize those whose lives have been deemed worthless by a system rooted in exploitation and racial oppression (or who have fought against that system). It will take nothing short of proletarian socialist revolution to destroy the prisons and sweep away all the barbaric institutions of the capitalist state.

The violence and savagery of the prisons, alongside the social ferment of the time, propelled Hugo Pinell, George Jackson, W.L. Nolen and others to see their oppression as a product of the capitalist system. Even so, as prisoners, they were cut off from the one class that has the social power to eradicate this system, the multiracial working class. However heroic, the prison revolts were a desperate response to desperate conditions. Unlike the New Left and others at the time, we did not enthuse over black and Latino prisoners as the “vanguard” of revolutionary struggle.

In memory of Hugo Pinell, we reiterate what we wrote in “Massacre at Attica,”



on the front page of the first issue of *Workers Vanguard* (October 1971):

“We support the most militant struggle against the state. We only seek to give that struggle the strategic perspectives that will lead to the workers conquering political power....

“The heroic Attica martyrs and George Jackson will long be remembered for their courageous stand against overwhelming odds. It is not the crimes (real or alleged) for which the prisoners were jailed, but the stand they took—rising far above capitalist-imposed ignorance, poverty, brutality and frame-up—for justice and against oppression, that the world’s working people will remember.”

The black, Latino and white cadre of a future revolutionary workers party will learn from and honor Pinell’s legacy. Under the leadership of such a party, the social power of the multiracial working class will be mobilized in the fight for the liberation of all the oppressed and for a workers America, putting the tremendous wealth now held by the tiny class of capitalist exploiters at the service of the many. When the workers rule here and internationally they will begin to lay the material basis for an egalitarian communist society where there will be no need for an apparatus of state repression. The modern instruments of incarceration, torture and death will be placed alongside their medieval complements as relics of a decaying social order that deserved to perish.■

## Book Launch...

(continued from page 5)

Sacco and Vanzetti from execution. In the upshot, neither campaign succeeded, but they did demonstrate the militancy and determination of the CP and brought it a wider audience and support among the broader labor movement.

The rise of Stalinization was wrapped up in this situation. Given the factionalism, it became increasingly clear that the American Communist Party could not resolve its problems on its own. Naturally, leading Communists looked to the Comintern—none more so than Cannon, who prided himself on being what he called a Cominternist. I want to defend Cannon here for a moment because many leftists, such as the International Socialist Organization’s Joel Geier, attack Cannon as some kind of bootlicker for the Comintern. Cannon’s problem was not that he looked to the Comintern to help the American Communist Party. In fact, the Comintern had done this in the past. Rather, Cannon did not understand that with the degeneration of the Soviet workers state, the Comintern was no longer the same, that the Comintern leadership was Stalinist, not Leninist.

In the mid and late 1920s, the Comintern *did* intervene. But it did so not to build a genuine Leninist party, but to create a pliable leadership that would support Stalin. It played each faction off against the others in a cynical game, and each faction courted the Comintern, trying to prove its loyalty. By the end of the decade, the Com-

leadership: if the main goal of the international Communist movement was to protect the Soviet bureaucracy, then revolution in the United States was no longer necessary. By the late 1930s, the CP had essentially become a tool to pressure the Democratic Party.

The final point I want to make about the Stalinist degeneration in the American party is that it was neither inevitable nor uncontested. Much of the leadership of the American party did accept Stalinism. This reflected, as I mentioned, the pressures of the period, the organizational maneuvers of the Comintern and also, to a large degree, Stalin’s false claim to the heritage of Bolshevism. However, just as in Soviet Russia and the Comintern as a whole, Stalinism required a break with Leninism. The one key CP leader who fought this break was Cannon. Precisely because Cannon had looked to the Comintern for Leninist guidance, not just as a source of factional power, he sensed that there was something different about it in the late 1920s than in the earlier period.

In 1928, he was sent as a delegate to the Sixth Comintern Congress. He was not particularly enthusiastic about this assignment, even though his faction seemed to be on the verge of obtaining power in the party. While in Moscow, he managed to read Trotsky’s criticism of the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, which was later published as *The Third International After Lenin*. This critique gave a systematic political explanation for Cannon’s dissatisfaction and won him to support Trotsky’s Left Opposition. Cannon was expelled from the CP for his support to Trotsky and

went on to found the Trotskyist Communist League of America. He saw the fight to forge a Trotskyist party as the continuation of his struggle for communism in the United States and internationally.

This history is beyond the scope of my book, which ends in 1929. But it does illuminate the point that I want to end on. As I mentioned, one of Theodore Draper’s strengths as a historian was that he sought out all the early Communists he could find. Many of them were still alive when he was writing in the 1950s, although many had broken with the Communist Party one way or another over the intervening decades. He noted that Cannon’s memories were always the most vivid, and, when he compared what Cannon remembered to the documentary record, they were the most accurate. The reason for this, Draper concluded, was not that Cannon had some kind of superhuman memory, but that he *wanted* to remember these early years.

That was because in the 1950s Cannon, unlike most of his former comrades, still wanted the same thing he had wanted in the 1920s: to build a revolutionary party capable of leading the American workers to power, part of building socialism internationally. Thus, Cannon understood that the lessons of the first attempt to build such a party in the United States, the CP in the 1920s, were absolutely vital. That is also the main reason motivating my own research: to make available the lessons of the early American Communist movement, not only—and not mainly—to academic historians, but to those who endeavor to build a proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist party today.■



# Black Freedom...

(continued from page 1)

*prop for capitalist rule and profits.* The forcible segregation of black people serves to divide the working class and suppress wages for black, white and immigrant workers alike. The horrific conditions of life—rotten schools and dilapidated housing, widespread unemployment and low-wage jobs, no health care—that blacks and immigrant workers have long endured are now increasingly faced by the working class as a whole. This reality exposes the lie that white workers materially benefit from the oppression of their class brothers and sisters. The unemployed white crystal meth addict in the Ozarks, whose father and grandfather haven’t had a regular job in decades, likely recognizes he isn’t very privileged. In fact, his perceived lack of privilege is soil for recruitment to the fascist race terrorists.

It used to be very fashionable to view the U.S. through the same lens as South Africa. A comparison with apartheid South Africa, whose development produced a near-complete overlap between class and race, is instructive. Practically the entire industrial proletariat of that country consists of black Africans, with some coloureds in the Western Cape and Indians in Durban. After 1948, what had been a sizable and privileged white working class, along with poor white Afrikaner farmers, was concentrated in the state bureaucracy. By the mid 1990s, one-third of the white labor force was employed in the government sector, mainly as useless pencil pushers. They enjoyed lives comparable to the upper layer of the American petty bourgeois—owning plush suburban homes, with swimming pools and household servants.

This strict racial hierarchy is not the case in the U.S. While blacks are on the bottom of society, whites as a whole are not on top. Millions of white women and children are on welfare (even after many were thrown off the rolls under Bill Clinton’s welfare “reform”), lack medical coverage and survive on food stamps. The large number of poor whites would be inconceivable in South Africa.

What black people have suffered for generations, continuing to this day, is defined by the particulars of U.S. history—slavery, the defeat of the Southern slavocracy by Northern industrial capitalism in the Civil War, and the bourgeoisie’s



Getty

**Beaten, gassed and jailed during 64-day strike in Memphis in 1968, sanitation workers protest racist contempt for black people while successfully fighting for union recognition and improved wages.**

betrayal of Radical Reconstruction and its promise of equality. This history led to the racist segregation of black people despite the economic integration of black toilers into the proletariat at the bottom.

## Race and Class in America

The racist contempt that is deeply embedded in American culture is rubbed in the face of the black population on a daily basis. It’s not just stop-and-frisk and physical abuse by the police for “walking while black”; the “zero tolerance” rules under which black children as young as five years old have been arrested for acting out a bit in school; the rotting public housing and the redlining to assure residential segregation. It is also expressed in the hideous demands recently made on the families of the victims of cop terror to forgive the killers. Forgive?! This from a ruling class whose Supreme Court has declared capital punishment—a legacy of slavery—to be one of the “principles that underlie the entire criminal justice system,” and that locks away fighters for black rights such as Mumia Abu-Jamal, Mondo we Langa, Ed Poindexter and Albert Woodfox, among many others framed up for crimes they never committed. Some have been kept in solitary for decades.

The pro-slavery, pro-KKK movie *Gone with the Wind* is still revered as a classic, even by liberals who would soil their pants if a German film festival featured the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*. “Classic rock” radio DJs wax on about their “peace and love” Woodstock experiences and then play Lynyrd Skynyrd’s segregationist anthem “Sweet Home Alabama.” The same contempt is seen in the Confederate flags that continue to adorn fairgrounds in New York State. It is also expressed in the vitriol directed at some of the greatest athletes of our time—foremost among them Barry Bonds, whose alleged use of performance-enhancing drugs is portrayed as violating the bogus ideal of American society as a meritocracy. Bonds and others are reviled by the same people who fawn so much over the parasitic British royal family (whose only accomplishment was to be born intact despite generations of inbreeding) that when Prince William’s wife sneezes they might as well tweet across the ocean “God Bless You Kate.”

Racism infects the working class precisely because the rulers of this country devised the myth of black inferiority to justify slavery and then propagated and constantly reinforce race prejudice to divide the laboring masses. As a result, the U.S. is the only advanced capitalist country never to have had a mass workers party representing even a deformed expression of the political independence of the proletariat. Writing in 1893 to a comrade in Hoboken, New Jersey, Karl Marx’s collaborator Friedrich Engels counted among the obstacles to forging such a party “especially, immigration, which divides

the workers into two groups: the native-born and the foreigners...who understand only their own language. And in addition the Negroes. Very powerful incentives are needed to form a single party out of these elements. There is sometimes a sudden strong *élan*, but the bourgeoisie need only wait passively, and the dissimilar elements of the working class will fall apart again.”

Wait passively is not what the American bourgeoisie does. The last 125 years have seen heroic integrated struggles—including the pitched battles in the 1930s that forged the CIO industrial unions, the greatest gain for black people since the Civil War and Reconstruction. At the same time, the bourgeoisie has undermined those struggles by pitting blacks, whites and immigrants against one another over scarce jobs and other resources. This divide-and-rule has resulted in atrocities—like the racist pogroms amid the massive strike wave of 1919 and the Detroit racist riot of 1943 over public housing.

## Black and Red

“White skin privilege,” as propounded by Ignatin in his 1967 letter “White Blindspot” to the Progressive Labor Party and adopted by a current of the New Left, emerged in a particular historical context, the same as the ghetto conflagrations mentioned earlier: defeat of the

It was in the period of the civil rights movement that our organization emerged, originating as the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) opposition within the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the historic party of Trotskyism in the U.S. By the early 1960s, the SWP had lost its revolutionary bearings and was tailing non-proletarian class forces, seen domestically in its policy of abstention from the Southern civil rights movement as well as its later embrace of black nationalism.

By 1963, the SWP majority had explicitly renounced the fight for communist leadership of the black struggle, relegating itself to the role of a “socialist” vanguard of the white working class. Before its expulsion beginning in December that year, the RT fought inside the SWP for the party to seize the opportunity to recruit black Trotskyist cadre to its ranks. The RT put forward a series of demands linking the fight for black rights to the broader struggles of the working class and addressing immediate needs, such as organized self-defense and unionization drives throughout the South.

As we elaborated in “Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” adopted at the founding conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. in 1966:

“Because of the generations of exceptional oppression, degradation and humiliation, Black people as a group have special needs necessitating additional and special forms of struggle. It is this part of the struggle which has begun today, and from which the most active and militant sections of Black people will gain a deep education and experience in the lessons of struggle. Because of their position as both the most oppressed and also the most conscious and experienced section, revolutionary black workers are slated to play an exceptional role in the coming American revolution.”

## A Materialist Understanding of Society

The purpose of this talk is to motivate a Marxist materialist program for the fight for black freedom as opposed to the idealism embodied in both black nationalism and guilty white liberalism, including the concept of “white skin privilege,” which falsely substitutes individual psychology for struggle against the racial oppression rooted in the capitalist profit system. We fight for black freedom on the program of revolutionary integration including mobilizing the working class against every manifestation of racial



Feanny/Saba

**Social power of multiracial proletariat: Teamsters demonstrate outside UPS headquarters in Manhattan during solid 1997 strike.**

liberal-led civil rights movement headed by MLK as it moved North. This defeat accelerated black separatist sentiment. The purge of leftists from the unions in the late 1940s and ’50s meant there was no significant left opposition in the labor movement to challenge the racist practices of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and fight racial oppression in society at large. One other factor was the absence of any revolutionary Marxist organization that intervened early in the civil rights movement before young black activists turned to black nationalism.

oppression. This approach is counterposed to liberal integration, which is premised on the utopian notion that equality for black people can be attained within the confines of this class society founded on black oppression.

Our program of revolutionary integrationism flows from the understanding that the American black population is neither a separate nation nor a separate class but rather is a doubly oppressed race-color caste. Freedom for blacks in the U.S. will not come about without a socialist revolution. And there will be no

## WORKERS VANGUARD



socialist revolution without the working class taking up the fight for black freedom. As Karl Marx wrote shortly after the Civil War, “Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.”

As Marxists, we view the motor force of history as the struggle between the oppressor class—today the capitalist class, which owns the means of production like land and factories—and the oppressed class. Under capitalism, that class is the proletariat, workers who have nothing but their labor power, which they sell to the capitalists in order to live. Capitalism is an irrational system based on production for private profit. It is incapable of providing for the needs of the world’s masses.

To preserve its class rule, the tiny capitalist class has at its disposal the vast powers of the state—the core of which is the army, cops, courts and prisons—as well as potent means of ideological subjugation in the schools, press and religion. The police truncheon, machine-gun fire, electric chair and firing squad have been the rulers’ rations for both white and black workers seeking to organize for their class interests. The capitalist state cannot be reformed to serve the interests of workers and the oppressed. It must be swept away by the proletariat and a workers government established in its place.

The proletariat is the only revolutionary class in society. This isn’t a moral question—i.e., exploitation and oppression do not make you more virtuous or progressive. Rather, it is a consequence of the proletariat’s unique role in capitalist production (and transport). Workers, toiling alongside one another in large numbers, generate the profits that go to the capitalists. It is because of this role in production that the working class has its social power. Indigenous peasants in southern Mexico may have harder lives, but they don’t have the social power or collective interest that the workers have in auto factories in that country’s north. Similarly, black people who left farms in the U.S. South for factories in urban centers found a potential social power that they could only have dreamed of before, along with a commonality of interest with their white co-workers. Shutting down production and transport through strikes and solidarity actions—these are the proletariat’s weapons in the class struggle.

Integral to capitalist production and class rule is ensuring that some part of the working class be unemployed—what Marx called an “industrial reserve army.” This “surplus population” is needed in order for capitalist production to expand during periods of boom and to hold down wages through competition for jobs. It also provides a pool from which to recruit strikebreakers and union-busters. Prior to the end of slavery, the U.S. recruited its surplus population from immigrants driven off their land in Ireland by famine; later, immigrants from Eastern and



Los Angeles, 1965: State terror against black people during Watts ghetto explosion.

Southern Europe as well as Asia played this role. Emancipation of the black slaves gave the American bourgeoisie a new, domestic source for its industrial reserve army, one that became increasingly important in the late 19th century, as U.S. capitalism entered the epoch of imperialism. From then to now, black people have been the last hired and first fired.

Black People in the U.S.: A Caste, Not a Nation

In much of the world, the consolidation of capitalist nation-states by a nationally homogeneous ruling class was accompanied by the forced incorporation of other peoples, some constituting a nation and others not. Those making up oppressed nations are subject not only to greater terrorization and discrimination in employment and housing but also to the suppression of the national culture—language, schools, religion. For example, Turkey long denied the existence of the Kurds, calling them mountain Turks, forcing them to adopt Turkish names and prohibiting the use of the Kurdish language.

Tsarist Russia was a prison house of peoples encompassing oppressed nations (like Poland and Ukraine). At the same time, there were non-national groups who were brutally oppressed: religious minorities, Jews, Turkic speaking peoples, etc. The Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, which led the working class to power in the October 1917 Russian Revolution, proclaimed the right of nations to self-determination. Their irreconcilable opposition to anti-Jewish bigotry and pogroms, discrimination against Roma (Gypsies) and all national, religious and ethnic oppression was instrumental to uniting the working class, with the support of the peasantry, to smash capitalist rule and maintain proletarian state power in a civil war against reactionary forces backed up by 14 invading capitalist armies.

The Bolshevik Party is our model. As Lenin wrote in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902):

“The Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalize all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”

The Russian Revolution was not made solely for Russia, but was considered the opening shot of a necessarily international struggle of labor against the rule of capital. It was an inspiration to the oppressed masses of the world and had a direct impact on the struggle of black people in the U.S. The intervention by the Communist International in the 1920s turned the attention of the American Communists to

the necessity of conducting special work among the oppressed black population—a sharp break from the practice of the earlier socialist movement. (On that topic, I highly recommend the new book by Jacob Zumoff, *The Communist International and U.S. Communism, 1919-1929* [see article, page 4].)

“Self-determination” is not an all-inclusive term applicable to the various oppressed sectors of the population: e.g., self-determination for gays, women, immigrants and so on. As Lenin described, self-determination is a democratic demand applying to oppressed nations that “means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state.”

As should be clear from the above, the American bourgeoisie didn’t invent the strategy of dividing the working class by national origin, religion and ethnicity. Race, however, is purely a social construct developed to justify the use of black Africans as slaves in the Americas. The oppression black people face in the U.S. is *not* the forcible assimilation of an oppressed nation, but rather is *forced segregation*. In contrast to the successive waves of immigrants who were met with ruthless discrimination only to later be welcomed into what’s called the American “melting pot,” black people have been

deprived of the right of assimilation. The historic struggles of black people in the U.S. have been for immediate economic, political and social equality—*not* for an independent state. For good reason.

Black people do not share a common territory with which to form an independent state. In 1928, the Communist Party adopted the view that the states in the Deep South Cotton Belt formed the basis for a black nation, a notion adopted by the Maoists and some black nationalist groups in the 1960s. Max Shachtman, then a leader of the American Trotskyists, noted in his 1933 document *Communism and the Negro* (published in 2003 as *Race and Revolution*) that although the Cotton Belt once held the majority of black people, they had no particular attachment to it, as shown by the Great Migration to the North. Shachtman wrote, “A common territory the Negroes have, but it is the United States as a whole and not any section of it.” He added: “The Negro cannot be said to constitute a national question within the Black Belt and something else outside of it without making a caricature and a sport out of the conception of a people as a nation.”

Black people in the U.S. comprise a race-color caste, integrated into the lower rungs of the economy while socially segregated. What determines their caste status is skin color. All black people—from unemployed workers to a distinguished Harvard professor—face discrimination based on the color of their skin. Black workers face double oppression—exploitation as a worker and racial discrimination. And black women workers are triply oppressed.

The Social Construct of Race

There is no biological basis for dividing humans into separate races. The race concept itself arose out of the need to demarcate black people as slaves and accordingly keep them separate from the rest of society. As veteran American Trotskyist Richard Fraser described at the onset of the civil rights movement:

“First the black skin was despised because it was the mark of a despised mode of production. But this despised mode of production was the creator of untold wealth and prosperity, and capitalist society cannot despise riches for long. So they turned the whole matter on its head....

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Marxist Bulletin

5

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Black Freedom...

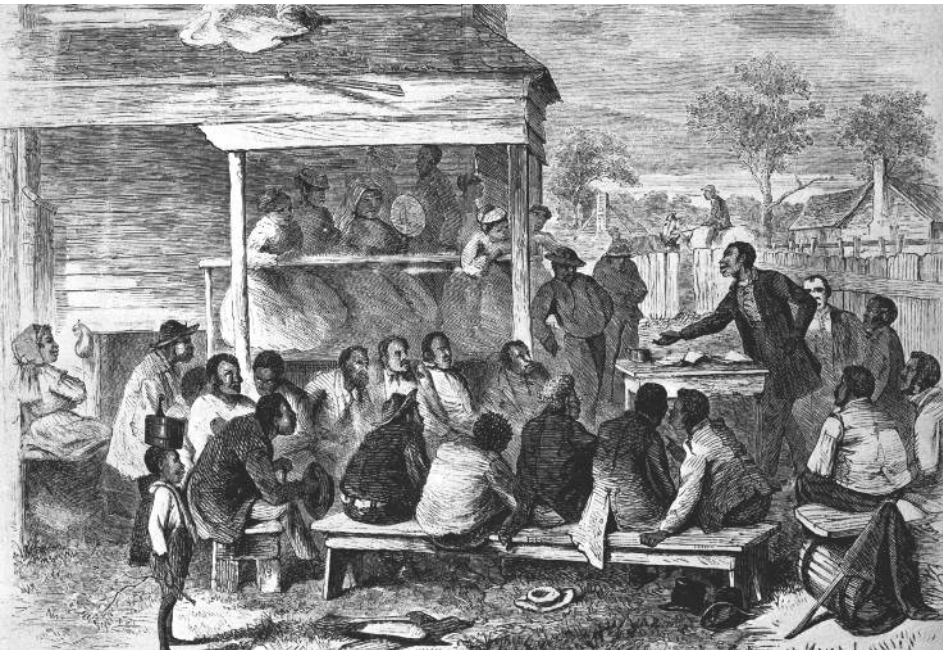
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“It was not the mode of slave production which was to be despised, but the slave: that the reason the black skin was the mark of the slave was that it was first the mark of human inferiority.”

This white-supremacist ideology contaminated not only lower-class whites in the South but also the emerging proletariat in the North. Before the Civil War, the Democratic Party, then dominated by the Southern slavocracy, gained support among the Irish Catholic immigrants who made up the bulk of unskilled urban workers in the North. The Democrats combined a posture of hostility toward the Yankee ruling elite with racist demagoguery that abolition would result in black freedmen taking white workers’ jobs and driving down wages.

Despite pervasive racist attitudes among all social classes in the North, the compelling historic interests of Northern capital led to a war against the Southern slavocracy. The Civil War was the last great bourgeois-democratic revolution, resulting in the abolition of black chattel slavery and the destruction of the old Southern plantation agricultural system. There followed a turbulent decade of interracial bourgeois democracy in the South implemented by freed slaves and their white allies and protected by federal troops, many of them black. This period, known as Radical Reconstruction, was the most egalitarian experiment in U.S. history.

The Compromise of 1877 sealed the betrayal of black freedom by the Northern capitalists. With the withdrawal of the Union Army from the South, a new



Harper's Weekly

1868 election rally of former slaves in South during post-Civil War Reconstruction, the most democratic period in U.S. history.

system of racist oppression was established through the systematic repression of the freedmen’s fight for land, education and civil rights. The former slaves became tenants and sharecroppers, toiling on land owned by the white propertied class, which consisted of elements of the former slavocracy and a new Southern bourgeoisie with strong ties to Northern capital.

As Fraser observed: “In the southern system and the race relations which derive from it, all Negroes are the victims of discrimination. But except for a minority of capitalists and privileged middle class people, the white population as such does not derive benefit from it. On the contrary, the white worker and farmer are as much the objects of class exploitation as are the Negroes. A majority of the workers and farmers in the South are white.

But their standard of living and general social condition is directly determined by that of the Negroes. “Therefore, while the dark race is the direct victim of discrimination, the group which gains from it is not the lighter skinned race but a class: the ruling capitalist class of the United States.”

Fraser added, “Race prejudice...is one of the means by which the extreme exploitation of white workers themselves is maintained.”

In the late 1800s, the Populist movement was initially multiracial, encompassing poor white and black farmers as well as small businessmen. The heroic efforts of its organizers in the South were defeated when an alliance of big planters, Southern capitalists and Northern financial interests initiated a campaign of violent race hatred, carried out by

local Democratic Party enforcers, which destroyed the developing black-white unity. Black people were disenfranchised, stripped of all legal rights and denied access to adequate education. The racism stoked during this period has had an ongoing impact on the South, where wages are far below the rest of the country, effective union organization is lacking and rural poverty crushes black and white alike.

A rigid system of legally enforced racial segregation called Jim Crow was imposed and maintained by lynch-rope terror and police-state repression of blacks and anti-racist whites. The rise of Jim Crow, which was law in the South but whose white-supremacist and segregationist spirit infected the whole country, dovetailed with the emergence of the U.S. as an imperialist power and served to fortify colonial oppression and exploitation. In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld “separate but equal” segregation in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

This remained the law of the land until the civil rights movement led the U.S. ruling class to acquiesce to granting the same political and legal rights that existed in the North to black people in the South. But even in the North, black people faced pervasive racist oppression. Two weeks after enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, protests against the cop killing of 15-year-old James Powell in Harlem were met with a full-scale police riot. Within days of the enactment of the Voting Rights Act the following summer, the Watts ghetto in Los Angeles exploded after the arrest of a black motorist. MLK fully supported the brutal suppression of the enraged populace of Watts, declaring: “It was necessary that as powerful a police force as possible be brought in to check them.”

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Jersey Docks...

(continued from page 12)

accident ascribed to mechanical failure. With 24-hour operation, the port bosses care more about keeping the equipment in use than about safety inspections and preventative maintenance.

For the shipping companies—not least at the APM terminal, which is owned by Maersk, the world’s largest shipping conglomerate—injuries and the loss of life are simply collateral damage in pursuit of higher profits. This expresses the brutal reality of the relationship between the working class and the capitalist class: workers, even relatively better-paid ones, sell their labor power to survive; capitalists, who own the means of production, extract their profits from workers’ labor. How much profit the bosses extract from the workers under capitalism is determined by the struggle between labor and capital. In addition to limiting wages, the bosses seek a longer and more labor-intensive workday to boost profits. The union is sup-

posed to be a basic defense organization of the workers to fight not only for higher pay and benefits, but also for better working conditions. Especially in industry and transport, it is safety that provides a direct measure of a union’s strength.

In this regard, the ILA leadership evades its own responsibility for enforcing safety standards against the bosses, while instead blaming the victim. In a Facebook statement mourning the death of Judy Jones, the ILA wrote that ILAers “will, in her memory, redouble their efforts to use only safe and designated walkways whenever they find themselves involved in pedestrian activities at any marine terminal.” *But there were no “safe and designated walkways” at APM!* The top loader driver has recently been charged with DUI. Blaming both the victim and the driver serves to divert attention from the company’s culpability.

Blaming the workers is standard for the bosses. But the union tops also place the responsibility for safety on *individual members* who are under tremendous pressure from the company to “get the job done” without delays. Workers are in a Catch-22 situation: facing company retribution if they flag too many safety issues, while facing company discipline and courting disaster if safety considerations are ignored. What is needed is to mobilize the *collective strength* of the union to enforce safety.

The push for increased productivity is felt by dock workers across the country, but working conditions are not quite as onerous on the West Coast. International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) bureaucrats are not fundamentally different from their ILA counterparts in failing to actively enforce safety, but the legacy of the 1934 West Coast maritime strike and San Francisco general strike is still a living heritage despite the many givebacks by the ILWU tops over the decades. The 1934 strike was won by mobilizing the mass strength and solidarity of longshoremen, seamen, teamsters and others in opposition to the forces of the capitalist class enemy. (For more on the 1934 strikes, see our new pamphlet, *Then and Now*.)

The main gain of the 1934 strike was that the union got control of the hiring hall, giving the union power over job allocation. The union hiring hall means employers cannot arbitrarily victimize or blackball workers for refusing to work under unsafe conditions. In disputes over safety, individual ILWU members covered by the master longshore contract have the *contractual* right to “stand by” (stop work) until a union rep arrives and the issue is resolved. They also work an eight-hour shift with a maximum of two hours overtime possible (but only if the ship is scheduled to sail at the end of the shift).

The ILWU and ILA both ultimately rely on joint company-union safety committees and arbitrators to adjudicate safety issues. But safe working conditions require constant vigilance and struggle *against* the employers. Longshoremen need their own *union* safety committees with representatives that have the author-

ity to *shut down unsafe work on the spot*. Excessive overtime, which causes fatigue and accidents, is encouraged by ILA tops. British labour eight-hour-day advocates used to say: “Accidents come in the eleventh hour.” ILA higher-ups function like labor brokers in that union dues are based on a percentage of the income of each longshoreman, so premium overtime pay greatly increases the dues base.

Workers need a union leadership that understands that the interests of the workers and employers are directly counterposed and mobilizes the power of the union accordingly. Strong class-struggle unions are a necessary counterweight to the capitalist employers. But such self-defense can win only temporary victories as long as society remains organized for profit, in the hands of the capitalists. When workers take state power in their own hands, then worker safety, not profit, will govern the conditions in which industry operates. ■

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Corbyn...

(continued from page 12)

a Marxist. Yet his campaign represents a working-class-based opposition to the rightist Blairite wing of the party that currently leads it. An August 12 leaflet issued by our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain (reprinted below) welcomes the Corbyn campaign, noting that it addresses issues that are in the interests of working people. At the same time, while the campaign’s chief demands are supportable, the fundamental issues facing the exploited and oppressed cannot be solved within the framework of Corbyn’s old Labour parliamentary reformism, which has always upheld the capitalist system.

The Labour Party was formed at the beginning of the 20th century by the trade-union bureaucracy in order to gain a voice in Parliament. The old Labour Party exemplified what Russian Revolution leader V.I. Lenin termed a bourgeois workers party, having a working-class base saddled with a pro-capitalist leadership and programme. What defined it as such was the party’s organic links to the trade unions. The unions were an integral part of the party structure—members of affiliated unions more or less automatically became members of the party and union dues provided its main source of funding.

As party leader, Tony Blair set out to “modernise” the party. Two decades ago, he declared his intention to sever the link with the unions, thus to transform Labour into an outright capitalist party like the U.S. Democratic Party. The “Blair project” has been a protracted one, not least because the party tops wanted to keep the union donations which remain the party’s main source of funding. Meanwhile, the pro-capitalist leadership of the unions clung to the Labour Party, even as the party became seen as toxic by the union rank and file. For some years Labour has been moribund as a reformist party of the working class. Finally, in March 2014, a special party conference voted to disaffiliate the trade unions over a period of five years. In a delightful irony, the new members who have surged into the party to support Corbyn are today eligible to vote for the party leader courtesy of new rules adopted at the conference that dis-affiliated the unions.

Corbyn insists that if elected he would want to maintain unity with the right wing of the party. But the clear fact is that two opposing classes are clashing within the framework of one party. On one side, the Blairites, who have a majority of Labour MPs, are unashamedly loyal to the City of London bankers and seek to expunge the connection to the unions. On the other side, Corbyn wants to rebuild the party’s connection to the unions, which are overwhelmingly backing him. At a campaign rally in Glasgow, the 1,000-strong audience roared its approval when Corbyn



Workers Hammer

Workers and youth fed up with austerity: 250,000-strong protest in London, June 20.

declared that he’s not ashamed of the party’s connection to the trade unions, he’s proud of it. His campaign is wildly popular with British working-class people, who have suffered the effects of major defeats for decades and for even longer have been told to know their place.

Following 18 years of Tory (Conservative) rule under Margaret Thatcher and her successor, Labour governments under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown continued with Thatcherite attacks on the unions, workers and minorities. Especially outrageous to the working class has been the piecemeal privatisation and running down of the National Health Service, which gives free healthcare to all. But the crime for which Blair is most reviled is taking Britain to war in Iraq alongside the U.S. When Jeremy Corbyn recently announced that, if elected, he would apologise for Britain’s role in the Iraq war, he launched a missile against the Blairites.

Comparisons have been made in the bourgeois press between the Corbyn campaign and that of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, cheered by a chunk of the U.S. fake left. However, there is a fundamental difference—Corbyn’s campaign seeks to recreate the “old Labour” reformist party, whereas Sanders is running for nomination by the Democratic Party, a bourgeois party. Whatever his “socialist” pretences, Sanders is a capitalist politician.

Moreover, there are substantive differences of policy between them. Sanders backed U.S. military interventions abroad, including Iraq and Afghanistan, enlisted in the “war against crime” (read: against black people) and backed a Senate resolution supporting the 2014 Israeli massacre of Palestinians in Gaza. For his part, Corbyn voted in Parliament against the invasion of Iraq and against the domestic measures enacted in the name of the “war on terror” which primarily targets Muslims. To thunderous applause at a west London rally he condemned Prime Minister David

Cameron’s vile racist comments about “a swarm” of immigrants. Not surprisingly, Corbyn has support among Britain’s black and Asian minorities.

Corbyn’s campaign has been ridiculed by the Labour Party tops, the Tory party and the right-wing press who all regard his brand of socialism as something that ought to be extinct. Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle skewered Corbyn’s critics in the House of Lords: “I’m enjoying senior Tory peers calling Corbyn a ‘throw-back’. A guy in a horsehair wig wearing a cape, who got a job for life because his great-great-great-grandfather had a knack for picking out the healthiest slaves?”

As to why the 66-year-old Corbyn has a substantial following among youth, a supporter quoted by Seumas Milne in the *Guardian* (5 August) explained: “People say he is an old leftwinger or an old Marxist but to my generation his ideas seem quite new.” Corbyn’s “old Labour” reformism rests on the pipe dream of refashioning British capitalism to meet the needs of working people through enacting legislation in Parliament and nationalising industry.

Corbyn argues for reindustrialisation of the country, which indeed is necessary, as is regenerating Britain’s infrastructure wholesale, rebuilding its rusting manufacturing base and putting the working class back into productive work. But finance capitalists will not opt to forgo the cool billions made through banking deals in favour of unknown returns on investment in reindustrialising the north of England. The bottom line for the capitalists is to invest where they can get the highest rate of return, and this cannot be changed through enacting legislation in Parliament. The party the working class needs is not a new version of “old Labour” but a revolutionary party to lead a fight for socialist revolution.

\* \* \*

“Corbyn could lose, be deposed, go wrong but I love that sound, that beautiful soft sound of Tony Blair sobbing” — Derek Wall, “Green socialist”

Jeremy Corbyn’s campaign for Labour Party leader has the right wing frothing at the mouth—from the *Daily Mail* and the Murdoch press to Tony Blair and his successors. Corbyn has drawn enthusiastic support from youth, workers, and minorities who are sick to the back teeth of the austerity, racism and war dished out for years by Tory and Labour governments. Here, for the first time in ages, is a campaign that *speaks to the felt needs of working people*.

Corbyn opposes Tory government attacks on benefits and the NHS, and is for decent pay and pensions for the public sector. He is for renationalising privatised services—rail, post and energy. All the main trade unions are backing Corbyn, not least because he is for repeal of the anti-union laws. He calls for affordable housing, desperately needed by the millions faced with extortionate house prices and rents. His campaign is for abolishing university tuition fees and restoring student grants. Corbyn opposes the government’s “war on terror” targeting Muslims. And to his credit, he denounced the Labour leadership for

caving in to UKIP’s anti-immigrant racism in the run-up to the general election. The Corbyn campaign outflanks to the left the bourgeois nationalists of the SNP [Scottish National Party] who wiped out Labour in Scotland in the election. Unlike the SNP, Corbyn opposes NATO and is for Britain out of this imperialist military alliance. In contrast to some on the left who howled with the imperialists over Ukraine, Corbyn could at least state the obvious that, “It is the US drive to expand eastwards which lies at the root of the crisis in the former Soviet republic” (*Morning Star* online, 17 April 2014). He is also opposed to renewing Britain’s Trident nuclear missile system and has long called for British troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq. Corbyn is critical of the European Union and calls for cancellation of the Greek debt, which has starved the Greek people. However, whereas we revolutionary Marxists oppose the imperialist-dominated EU in principle, Corbyn wants to reform it, calling for a “better Europe.”

A principled and honest representative of the left wing of old Labour in the tradition of Nye Bevan, Michael Foot and Tony Benn, Corbyn is an eloquent spokesman for the cause of parliamentary “socialism.” All old Labour governments have loyally served the British capitalist class—carrying out attacks on the working class at home, supporting British imperialism in its wars abroad. Labour supported British imperialism in World War II, presided over the bloody partition of India, and in 1969 sent troops to Northern Ireland. Unity with the right wing of Labour has long been an article of faith for the Labour lefts, including Benn and Corbyn, while reformist groups like the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in turn tailed the Labour lefts.

While the demands posed by the Corbyn campaign are supportable, they cannot be achieved through old Labour parliamentarism. Even to begin to address such issues as jobs for all, free quality healthcare and education requires mobilising the trade unions as fighting organisations of the working class, under new, class-struggle leadership. To regenerate the former industrial areas and to lay the basis for a decent living standard for all requires the overthrow of capitalist rule. Socialist revolution will shatter the capitalist state, expropriate the bourgeoisie and lay the basis for an internationally planned, socialised economy.

Victorious workers revolution in Britain will put an end to Westminster-based capitalist rule: abolish the monarchy, the established churches and the House of Lords! For the right of self-determination of Scotland and Wales! For a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles! For a Socialist United States of Europe!

The Spartacist League fights to construct the revolutionary workers party, section of a reformed Trotskyist Fourth International, that is necessary for this task. ■

ISIS...

(continued from page 3)

on the Iraqi city of Falluja. More recently, reports have emerged of Arab residents being driven out of northern Syria by the U.S.-allied Kurdish People’s Protection Committees (YPG).

Loren writes, “The de facto SL policy for the Kurds is to stand by and cheer as the Islamic fascists kill them.” No. We have never denied the right of any community to defend itself. What we oppose is the Kurdish nationalists acting as proxies of imperialism. Loren does not dispute that they are playing that role; he merely excuses it by claiming that they “had no choice.” In fact, the Kurdish nationalists have subordinated the just struggle for Kurdish national rights to their role as imperialist proxies, a crime for which the long-oppressed Kurdish people will pay the price.

In “Down With U.S. War Against ISIS!” (WV No. 1055, 31 October 2014), we warned, “By selling their souls to the imperialists as well as to various regional

bourgeois regimes, Kurdish leaders help perpetuate the divide-and-rule stratagems that inevitably inflame communal, national and religious tensions and serve to reinforce the oppression of the Kurdish masses.”

As has happened many times in the past, the Kurds’ supposed benefactors have now turned on them. Last month, in exchange for use of the Incirlik Air Base in Turkey to launch operations against ISIS, the U.S. gave the Ankara regime the green light to launch airstrikes in northern Iraq against the YPG’s allies, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK, which both the U.S. and Turkey label as “terrorist”). These airstrikes are facilitated by intelligence about PKK bases in Iraq that the U.S. has been supplying to Turkey since 2007. The Turkish government is also cracking down on domestic opposition, arresting hundreds of Kurdish militants and others.

The myriad peoples of the Near East will not know peace, prosperity or justice until bourgeois rule in the region is overthrown through a series of socialist revolutions. Such a perspective demands first and foremost implacable opposition to imperialism. ■



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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Labour Party Fight Rocks Britain Jeremy Corbyn: Tony Blair's Nightmare!



Crowd listening to Jeremy Corbyn in Durham, England, former coal mining center, July 11. Inset: Corbyn at August 17 rally in west London.

LONDON—A startling change has shaken up the political terrain in Britain this summer. With the defeat of the Labour Party in the May general election, Labour leader Ed Miliband resigned, opening up an election inside the party for its top post. Jeremy Corbyn, a longtime Labour Member of Parliament (MP), entered the race on a pro-working-class, anti-austerity programme and has rocketed to frontrunner. Voting, by post and online, is underway and the result will be announced on 12 September.

Three of the four candidates—Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall—stand in the anti-working-class tradition of “New Labour” under Tony Blair. Jeremy Corbyn is a stalwart of the left wing of the pre-Blair “old Labour” party. An MP for 32 years, Corbyn has voted against the party “whip” (directives on how to vote) some 500 times since 2001. Yet until now he has managed to remain in the background, not rocking the boat.

Corbyn's meteoric rise to frontrunner in

the Labour leadership contest has shocked virtually everyone, including Corbyn himself, and provoked panic in the party establishment. Up and down the country, working people and youth are packing meeting halls and cheering Corbyn. Since May, the party has tripled its size to some 600,000, with hundreds of thousands joining as members or paying the £3 [\$4.50] fee to sign up as supporters in order to vote for Corbyn. Horrified by this mass influx for Corbyn, the party leadership

launched an intense red-scare-style witch hunt of his supporters, screaming that the party is being infiltrated by “Trotskyites” and other evil elements. Present and former party leaders wail that a Corbyn win would render Labour “unelectable.” The party apparatus is feverishly working through the newly registered membership rolls and has disqualified over 50,000 votes so far.

Corbyn is not and does not claim to be  
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## ILA Must Fight for Safety!

# New Jersey Docks: Death Trap

On August 7 at about 1:20 p.m., 49-year-old longshore worker Judy Jones was struck by a top loader used to move shipping containers around the APM terminal at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. Her leg was severed and she bled to death waiting for an ambulance to arrive. There are no medical or ambulance facilities on the docks and the nearest trauma center hospital is about eight miles away in Newark. Reportedly it took more than half an hour for the ambulance to arrive.

From a longshore family, Jones was a member of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) Newark Local 1233, as is her brother, Wayne Jones. A veteran dock worker with 18 years experience, on the day she was killed she was a “holdman,” working containers on the dock. As reported by the Blueocean website, in order to take a bathroom break, she had to get to a restroom 400 yards away. Jones was struck while walking through the busy terminal amid the many moving vehicles and equipment that transfer the containers (which can weigh up to 30 tons). Longshoremen told WV that there are no designated pedestrian walkways at the APM terminal (although the company is no doubt slapping some paint on the pavement after the fact) and that



ILA longshoreman Judy Jones (inset), killed on August 7 while working at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey.

APM is the only major container terminal in the area that does not provide a passenger vehicle for “holdmen” to safely move about the terminal.

Cargo traffic at the New York-New Jersey (NY-NJ) port has increased almost 20 percent in the last decade, but the terminal area for handling this cargo has remained

the same. The bustling container storage areas are jam-packed, and longshoremen are under tremendous pressure to keep the containers moving in and out of the yard. The drivers of the massive container-handling machines—top loaders, straddle carriers and transtainers—have limited visibility. Transtainer operators often have to rely solely on safety sensors and cameras (assuming they're working).

On top of the speedup, ILA members on the Jersey docks work grueling amounts of overtime. During the busy summer season, it is common for workers to put in **over 100 hours** a week. According to the *Journal of Commerce*, overtime accounts for a staggering 61 percent of ILA work hours at the NY-NJ port. Unlike other ports with fixed work shifts, ILAers here work open-ended shifts until the ship is finished, which can be **24 hours or more** (punctuated by breaks).

Longshoring ranks high among the most dangerous industries, but under these intolerable conditions of speedup and fatigue, avoidable accidents that maim and kill are inevitable—it's industrial murder. In 2012, Earline Brundage, another woman member of Local 1233, died after being pinned between two containers, an  
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