



**You Can't Fight Trump with Capitalist Parties!
No to the Democrats, Greens!**

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

The inauguration of Donald Trump as Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism rightly scares the daylight out of millions of people here and worldwide. He and his entourage of virulently racist, women-hating, immigrant-bashing, union-busting, science-denying, anti-gay billionaires proposed for cabinet posts are truly a gallery of ghouls. Thousands are pouring out in protests, but their justified fear and anger are being cynically manipulated by the Democratic Party and its leftist chambermaids to tamp down militancy and entrap protest in an electoral framework that offers workers and the oppressed nothing but the right to be exploited and kicked around by the capitalists under Democratic Party rule instead.

Left: Trump and his pick for U.S. attorney general, racist bigot Jeff Sessions, meet at Trump Tower, October 7. Right: New York University students protest racist anti-Muslim provocation on campus in wake of Trump's election, November 16.

Historically, the Democrats offer the solace of lies and murmur that they feel the pain of working people and minorities. But this time around Hillary Clinton was particularly blatant in her courtship of Wall Street and indifference to workers and black people. Obama was lifted to power on the votes of people who heard him promise "hope and change." Eight years later, the only "change" under

Obama came from the *ka-ching* of the cash register as the Democrats bailed out Wall Street and the auto barons while screwing the workers. Income inequality has soared, and job precarity, hunger and homelessness are rampant. Meanwhile, the fabulously rich get fabulously richer. In a country founded on the bedrock of black chattel slavery, there is a distinct complexion to inequality that not even a black president

could mask. Misplaced hope that Obama's presidency would alleviate grinding racial oppression has withered as unarmed black men, women and children have continued to be gunned down by the police in cities and suburbs across the country.

It is necessary to categorically reject the lie that American "democracy," which is nothing but a ruthless dictatorship of the capitalist ruling class, can be reformed in the interests of the oppressed. It is high time to express America's only hope by mobilizing *class hatred* against capitalist rule in militant, racially integrated class struggle. The liberation of women, equality for immigrants, and freedom of the entire working

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Anti-Russia Hysteria and Democrats' Sour Grapes

Hillary Clinton's failed presidential campaign had two major themes. The first asserted that voters were well on the road to recovery from the ravages of the 2008 recession, an assertion garnished with a sprig of patriotic parsley encapsulated in the slogan "America is great." The second theme was to question whether a sexist, racist, egomaniacal admirer of Russian president Vladimir Putin should be placed in charge of the nuclear launch button. The rather contradictory implication was that he might casually ignite an atomic Armageddon or fail to do so if the annihilation of Russia (and the rest of humanity) rose to the top of the

imperialists' agenda. In the event, a major chunk of the electorate thought the first theme was hogwash, and many were apparently unmoved by the efforts to revive the battle cries of the Cold War and McCarthy eras. In the final analysis, what won the day in the key swing states was the claim by the reactionary Trump that he, and he alone, could provide the personal elixir required to purge the country of the forces that have eroded the good jobs and prosperity that once were the supposed birthright of every white American male.

Since the election, the Democrats have pulled out all the stops in an effort to persuade the world that "we wuz robbed" by an attack of hackers operating under the command of Putin with the intent of undermining "American democracy" by electing his puppet Trump. Their proof: a gilt-edged report prepared by the CIA, the FBI and the National Security Agency (NSA) that purportedly tracks the chain of command to the Kremlin. Widely accused of playing a role in tipping the election to Trump is WikiLeaks founder Julian

Assange, as well as FBI director James Comey. It is as yet unclear if the Pope played any role in this cabal. These complaints of Russian interference in the presidential election are pretty rich coming from the U.S. rulers. Ever since American imperialism emerged onto the world stage during the 1898 Spanish American War, it has intervened around the world through outright invasion or "regime change." In the early years of the 20th century, the U.S. routinely dispatched troops to

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Down With the Sanctions!



Partisan Defense Committee

The PDC is a class-struggle, non-sectarian legal and social defense organization which champions cases and causes in the interest of the whole of the working people. This purpose is in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League.

CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES

Peltier: Former Prosecutor Calls for Clemency

The campaign to free Leonard Peltier received a boost in late December when James Reynolds, a former U.S. Attorney involved in the criminal frame-up of Peltier, wrote to President Obama saying clemency would be “in the best interest of Justice considering the totality of all matters involved.” This unexpected development is welcome and also speaks to the blatant frame-up of the American Indian Movement activist. Peltier was convicted of killing two FBI agents who were shot during a 1975 government assault on the

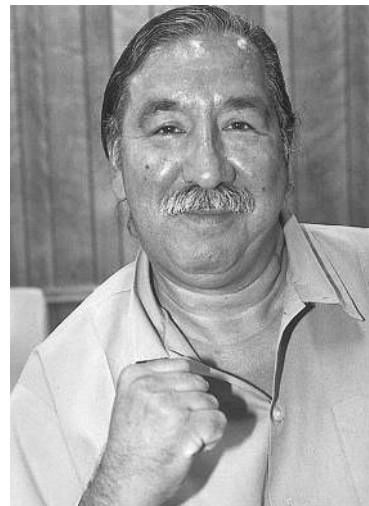
Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and was sentenced to two life terms. Discussing his letter to Obama with the New York *Daily News* (3 January), Reynolds admitted that “we might have shaved a few corners here and there” in the trial and the appeal. When asked if Peltier had killed the FBI agents, Reynolds told the *Daily News*, “He may not have.”

Peltier is an innocent man who never should have spent a day in prison. He is internationally renowned as an unbowed fighter who symbolizes resistance against

this country’s racist repression of American Indians, the survivors of centuries of genocidal oppression. At his trial, the judge refused to allow any evidence of the government terror against the Indian reservation; ballistics evidence proving Peltier’s innocence was suppressed and “witnesses” were coerced to lie. At an appeal hearing in 1985, the lead prosecutor admitted, “We can’t prove who shot those agents.” The government has robbed Peltier of more than **40 years of his life**, repeatedly denying him parole because he steadfastly refuses to admit guilt for a crime he did not commit.

A spokesman for Peltier reported that he does not want to get his hopes up given the number of past disappointments he has faced. Despite statements by 50 members of Congress and a judge who sat as a member of the court at both appeals calling for his release, Peltier has remained in federal penitentiaries around the country, often very far from his family and people. Peltier is now 72 years old and suffers from multiple serious medical conditions. In February 2016 he formally petitioned for clemency.

Leonard Peltier is one of the class-war prisoners who receive a monthly stipend



Cainmo.com

Leonard Peltier, April 2013.

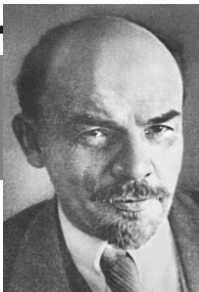
from the PDC, which has long championed his freedom. When his health crisis worsened in January 2016, the PDC wrote to President Obama calling for Peltier’s immediate and unconditional release. We urge our readers to demand Peltier’s freedom now by contacting President Barack Obama, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20500 and the Office of the Pardon Attorney, Honorable Robert A. Zauzmer, Acting Pardon Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20530; telephone: (202) 616-6070; email: USPardon.Attorney@usdoj.gov. You can also write to Leonard Peltier, #89637-132, USP Coleman I, P.O. Box 1033, Coleman, FL 33521. ■



TROTSKY

100 Years

Lenin and the Bolshevik Revolution



LENIN

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution, which swept away the capitalist exploiters and landlords and established the working class in power. Key to the success of the Revolution was the Bolshevik Party and its leader V.I. Lenin. January is also the month in which communists honor the “Three Ls”: Lenin, who died on 21 January 1924, and German Communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who were assassinated on 15 January 1919 at the behest of the German Social Democratic government as part of its suppression of a mass working-class uprising.

What were the advantages of Bolshevism? A clear and thoroughly thought-out revolutionary conception at the beginning of the revolution was held only by Lenin. The Russian cadres of the party were scattered and to a considerable degree bewildered. But the party had authority among the advanced workers. Lenin had great authority with the party cadres. Lenin’s political conception corresponded to the actual development of the revolution and was reinforced by each new event. These advantages worked wonders in a revolutionary situation, that is, in conditions of bitter class struggle. The party quickly aligned its policy to correspond with Lenin’s conception; to correspond, that is, with the actual course of the revolution. Thanks to this, it met with firm support among tens of thousands of advanced workers. Within a few months, by basing itself upon the development of the revolution, the party was able to convince the majority of the workers of the correctness of its slogans. This majority, organized into soviets, was able in its turn to attract the soldiers and peasants.

How can this dynamic, dialectical process be exhausted by a formula of the maturity or immaturity of the proletariat? A colossal factor in the maturity of the Russian proletariat in February or March 1917 was Lenin. He did not fall from the skies. He personified the revolutionary tradition of the working class. For Lenin’s slogans to find their way to the masses, cadres had to exist, even though numerically small at the beginning; the cadres had to have confidence in the leadership, a confidence based on the entire experience of the past. To cancel these elements from one’s calculations is simply to ignore the living revolution, to substitute for it an abstraction, the “relationship of forces”; because the development of the revolution precisely consists of the incessant and rapid change in the relationship of forces under the impact of the changes in the consciousness of the proletariat, the attraction of the backward layers to the advanced, the growing assurance of the class in its own strength. The vital mainspring in this process is the party, just as the vital mainspring in the mechanism of the party is its leadership. The role and the responsibility of the leadership in a revolutionary epoch is colossal.

—Leon Trotsky, “The Class, the Party, and the Leadership,” August 1940, reprinted in *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)* (Pathfinder, 1973)

Mumia: Court Orders Hep C Treatment



Freemumia.com

Mumia Abu-Jamal, March 2014.

On January 3, U.S. federal district judge Robert Mariani ordered the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) to administer life-saving hepatitis C treatment to Mumia Abu-Jamal. This ruling is the product of an urgent legal battle by Mumia after his active hepatitis C brought him close to death in March 2015. Pennsylvania’s prisons have refused to pay for the new, effective but expensive, treatments. While we welcome this ruling, we understand that the racist capitalist state has pursued a vendetta against Mumia and wanted to see him dead for over 35 years. Mumia’s lawyer Robert Boyle warned: “The struggle is far from over: The DOC will no doubt appeal this ruling.”

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a former Black Panther Party spokesman, a well-known supporter of the MOVE organization and an award-winning journalist known as “the voice of the voiceless.” Framed up for the 1981 killing of a Philadelphia police officer, Mumia was sentenced to death explicitly for his political views. Federal and state courts have repeatedly refused to consider evidence proving his

innocence, including the sworn confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, shot and killed the policeman. In 2011, the Philadelphia district attorney’s office dropped its longstanding effort to legally lynch Mumia, but he remains condemned to life in prison with no chance of parole.

If Mumia is successful in his fight to receive treatment, it will set a precedent for tens of thousands of other prisoners. Medical care is urgent, but what is also necessary is to demand his release from the clutches of the racist capitalist state. **Free Mumia now!**

We encourage our readers to contribute to his legal expenses. Contributions can be sent to the Committee to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal, care of the National Lawyers Guild Foundation, 132 Nassau St., Room 922, New York, NY 10038, earmarked “Mumia legal expenses.” ■

WORKERS VANGUARD

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CLASS-STRUGGLE DEFENSE NOTES

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WORKERS VANGUARD

For Free Abortion on Demand!

Ireland

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer No. 237, Winter 2016-2017, newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain.

WORKERS HAMMER

On 25 November 2016, supporters of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment protested in Dublin and solidarity demonstrations were held in cities around the world. Passed in 1983, the Eighth Amendment of the Irish Constitution guarantees the “right to life of the unborn” and grotesquely equates the life of a pregnant woman with an embryo or foetus. While abortion had already been illegal under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, the Eighth Amendment has ensured that it remains illegal in all cases bar when the very life of the woman is under threat. Three years ago, following tremendous popular outrage over the death of Savita Halappanavar, who had been denied what could have been a life-saving abortion, the government passed legislation establishing a torturous process which a woman must go through to obtain a termination of her life-threatening pregnancy. That law, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act, repealed the offence of “procuring a miscarriage” as stipulated in the 1861 law, but replaced it with a more far-reaching offence, “to intentionally destroy unborn human life,” for which the penalty was set at up to 14 years imprisonment.

To get abortions, Irish women are forced to travel to Britain (as did more than 3,400 in 2015) or illegally import abortion pills (Misoprostol and Mifepristone) ordered online. The numbers who use such pills are unknown, but the demand for them is shown by the number of customs seizures: over 1,000 pills in 2014. Abortion is a simple and safe medical procedure which should be available to all as part of the health service. Bans on it heap more expense and stress onto women and are particularly onerous for poor, young and immigrant women who cannot afford to travel or are not allowed to do so. They may also endanger women by deterring them from seeking medical assistance in the event of complications from taking abortion pills.

Repeal of the Eighth Amendment is necessary, but by itself repeal will not bring any actual abortion rights in Ireland. Comrades from the Spartacist League/Britain participated in a November 26 solidarity protest in London, and raised demands reflecting what Irish women actually need, not only in the South but also in Northern Ireland where abortion is outlawed: *For free abortion on demand, North and South!*

Abortion is politically explosive be-

cause it provides women with some control over whether or not to have children. This raises the spectre of equality for women and threatens to undermine the family, the main source of women’s oppression. The liberation of women requires the overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of a workers state. The working class in power will lay the ground for the disappearance of religious obscurantism and the replacement of the institution of the family by collective means of caring for and socialising children and by the fullest freedom of sexual relations.

In Ireland, the Catholic church has long been one of the central pillars of capitalist rule. The bishops were among the driving forces behind the passage of the Eighth Amendment and have been the staunchest opponents of even the slightest loosening of the ban on abortion. Ireland today is a vastly different society to what it was in 1983, as shown by the resounding yes vote in the 2015 referendum allowing gay marriage. Of course the church called for a no vote in that referendum and the Vatican’s secretary of state called its passage “a defeat for humanity.” Today the church is rightly despised by wide swathes of the population and its “moral” teachings about sexuality are widely disregarded. Recent opinion polls have consistently shown a clear majority in favour of repealing the Eighth Amendment and decreasing the restrictions on abortion.

Yet the church continues to wield tremendous power in Irish society. It still runs the vast majority of schools, and many hospitals operate under a Catholic “ethos.” Shadowy Catholic lay organisations like Opus Dei and the Iona Institute work to ensure they exert great influence in health, education and the media. And a great number of politicians, not least Taoiseach [Prime Minister] Enda Kenny, persist in showing obeisance to the Vatican.

The November 25 protests were held on the day before the first full meeting of a “Citizens’ Assembly” established by the Irish government that is to put forward proposals on the question of the Eighth

Amendment. As Irish governments have done for the last 33 years, the real purpose of the Citizens’ Assembly is to kick the issue of abortion down the road. Its eight days of meetings are being spread over four months; its proposals are expected around June 2017 and they will then be examined by a parliamentary committee which will make recommendations to the government. Any changes to the Constitution would then need to be approved by the Irish parliament and then be put to the public in a referendum, which the government has said will not be held until 2018 at the earliest.

Enda Kenny recently travelled to Rome in preparation for Pope Francis’ visit to Ireland in August 2018 for the Vatican’s World Meeting of the Family which will come with a security price tag of €20 million [\$21 million]. While there, Kenny ran his plans for the Citizens’ Assembly by the pontiff, who presumably gave it his blessing. The government was quick to make it clear that Francis’ visit would not coincide with any abortion referendum, but the visit will surely be used to whip up clericalist fervour.

On October 27, the government used the prospect of the Citizens’ Assembly to block a bill proposed by TDs [Members of Parliament] from the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party (under their current parliamentary guise, the Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit [AAA-PBP]) to hold a referendum on repealing the Eighth Amendment. Independent TDs on whom the government relies also voted to block the bill, including those like Katherine Zappone who are on record as being in favour of repealing the Eighth. The Labour Party voted to hold the referendum, but when it was part

of the last government it opposed holding such a referendum.

Labour’s social-democratic tails in the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party have long counselled an incremental approach to the fight for abortion rights. First they called to “legislate for the X case,” for which in 1992 the Supreme Court ruled that abortion was permitted to save the life of the pregnant woman including if she was threatening suicide. That two-decade campaign resulted in the 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act, which in fact copperfastened the ban on abortion. Now their energies are devoted to the campaign to repeal the Eighth. Both the SP and SWP (as well as several of their front groups) are members of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, a class-collaborationist lash-up which includes a range of bourgeois feminist and gay rights groups, several trade unions and Amnesty International. The latter recently displayed its anti-communist credentials by joining Catholic reactionaries in condemning Irish president Michael D. Higgins for praising the deceased Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

The only way to win any meaningful abortion rights (as well as decent health and childcare) is through mass struggle against the capitalist state and the reactionary anti-woman forces behind it, not least the Catholic church. It is only the working class which has both the social power to successfully wage such a struggle and the interest in achieving free access to this safe medical procedure for all women in Ireland. To lead this struggle it is necessary to forge a workers party committed to the destruction of the capitalist system through workers revolution—the only way to open the road to emancipation for women. ■

Workers Hammer



Spartacist supporters join abortion rights protest outside Irish Embassy in London, November 26.

31st Annual PDC Holiday Appeal

Free All Class-War Prisoners! Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

OAKLAND

Saturday, January 21, 4 to 8 p.m.

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Remember Attica

Blood in the Water:

The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy

by Heather Ann Thompson
(Pantheon, 2016)

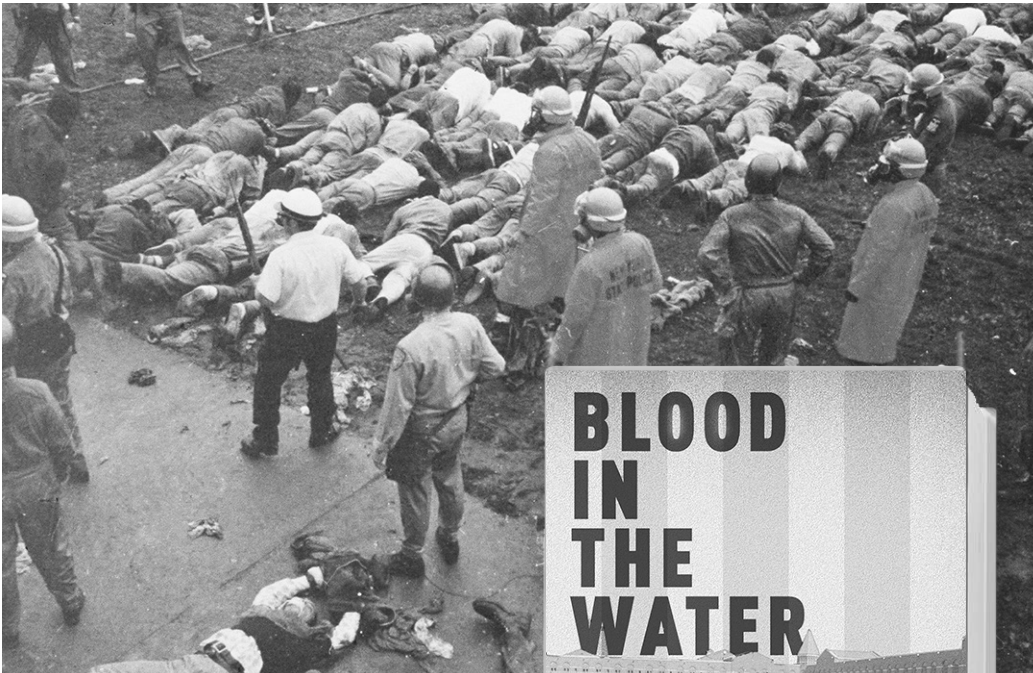
A Review

On the morning of 9 September 1971, nearly 1,300 inmates—predominantly black and Puerto Rican—took over the state prison at Attica, New York. Four days later 29 of them lay dead, cut down in a hail of bullets fired by New York State Police, sheriffs and corrections officers. Governor Nelson Rockefeller gave the order. President Richard Nixon cheered them on. In the aftermath, the surviving prisoners were subjected to hideous torture and later charged with a total of 1,300 crimes. Among these were kidnapping and, most obscenely, unlawful imprisonment based on taking prison guards hostage, ten of whom were gunned down by Rockefeller’s stormtroopers when they retook the prison.

For many years, Democratic and Republican administrations in Albany, along with the courts, have covered up much of the truth of what took place at Attica, assisted by the same capitalist press that peddled the lie that the prisoners shot the guards. A significant part of that shroud has been peeled back by Heather Ann Thompson in her recent book, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*. Thompson’s book brings to life the dignity and humanity of the prisoners who were treated as little more than dirt by Rockefeller and his ilk. She describes in vivid detail the dehumanizing conditions that gave rise to the rebellion and the racist venom that ran from the governor’s mansion down to the cops and prison guards who hunted down the uprising’s leaders. Thompson got her own sampling of that venom for naming the prison guards who carried out assassinations and torture.

Thompson’s comprehensive history is a result of her many years of diligent archival research and a bit of good fortune in uncovering key sources that had been suppressed. As she notes, “The most important details of this story have been deliberately kept from the public. Literally thousands of boxes of documents relating to these events are sealed or next to impossible to access.” Regarding the most explosive documents she uncovered, Thompson says, “All of the Attica files that I saw in that dark room of the Erie County courthouse have now vanished.”

For millions around the world, Attica became a potent symbol of rebellion against brutal repression—and a stark



AP

State troopers brutalize prisoners after murderous suppression of Attica uprising, 13 September 1971.

emblem of racist state murder. To this day it continues to inspire struggles against the racist degradation of black people inside and outside of prison walls. The first issue of *Workers Vanguard* (October 1971) led with the headline “Massacre at Attica.” We stated bluntly: “The brutal, bloody murderers of Attica are none other than the ruling class of this society,” saying further:

“Rockefeller cut down the Attica prisoners in the manner of his father and grandfather before him—ruthlessly and to protect the system from which his profits spring. From the murder of the Ludlow miners to the present, this family has carried the policies of the armed fist over the entire globe.... The Rockefeller name and the Rockefeller practice symbolize, more than any other, the American capitalist class—a class that will stop at nothing to extend and protect its profitable holdings.”

Attica was an explosion waiting to happen. The 2,200 men warehoused in a facility built for 1,600 were routinely beaten by guards, locked in cells 16 hours a day, rationed one sheet of toilet paper daily, one bar of soap a month and one shower per week—even in the heat of summer. Among the main grievances was censorship of reading materials—no newspapers, very few books, and nothing at all to read in Spanish. It wasn’t an absolute ban—the prison authorities mocked the prisoners by supplying magazines such as *Outdoor Life*, *Field and Stream*, *American Home* and *House Beautiful*.

Hours after the revolt began, L.D. Barkley, a 21-year-old Black Panther Party member imprisoned for violating parole by driving without a license, read out the prisoners’ powerful declaration: “We are *men!* We are not beasts and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such.”

The prisoners called for the minimum wage for prison work (they were paid slave wages of between 20 cents and one dollar per day), accompanied by an end to censorship and restrictions on political activity, religious freedom, rehabilitation, education and decent medical care. They expressed solidarity with the Vietnamese workers and peasants as well as others fighting U.S. imperialism. The main demand was amnesty for participating in the rebellion, along with “speedy and safe transportation out of confinement, to a Non-Imperialist country.” Most likely in mind were Cuba, where the capitalist rulers had been overthrown and a bureaucratically deformed workers state led by Fidel Castro established, or Algeria, a capitalist state governed by left nationalists that had given refuge to Black Panthers in exile.

As Thompson points out, many of the prisoners at Attica were veterans of eruptions over similar conditions at Manhattan’s Tombs detention center and the

largely of Black Muslims. His group treated the prison guards taken hostage with a humanity that the prisoners had been denied.

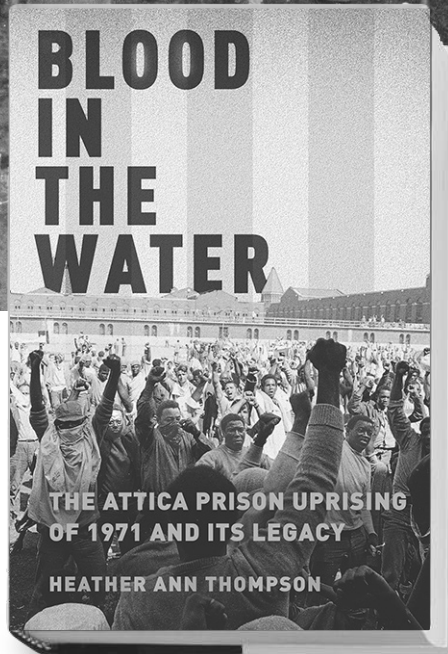
For a long time before *Blood in the Water*, the biggest window into what took place at Attica came from Tom Wicker’s *A Time to Die*. Wicker, a *New York Times* reporter, along with radical attorney William Kunstler, was among the outside observers whom the prisoners demanded to negotiate through rather than directly with prison and state authorities. Prison officials granted this one demand, intending to use the observers to convince the prisoners to release the hostages and surrender without amnesty. To his credit, BPP leader Bobby Seale, whom the prisoners also sought as an observer, uniquely refused to be involved in attempts to nudge the inmates toward surrender. Seale made clear the BPP position that “all political prisoners who want to be released to go to non-imperialistic countries should be complied with.”

The retaking of Attica began in the morning of September 13 with a cloud of CN and CS gas dropped from a helicopter that covered every prisoner with a nauseating, incapacitating powder and it ended with a bloodbath. The rebellion’s leadership paid dearly. Barkley, Melville and others were assassinated in the prison yard. Surviving prisoners, including the wounded, were stripped naked, made to crawl through the mud and the blood, then lined up to run a gantlet over broken glass and be beaten by cops and guards wielding what they called their “n-----r sticks.” After being threatened with castration, Big Black Smith was forced to lie on a table for five hours with a football tucked under his chin, under threat of being shot if it rolled loose.

For the capitalist ruling class, Attica had to be crushed with particular vengeance because the rebels had begun to see their struggle in political and even revolutionary terms. One of Thompson’s discoveries is Nixon’s celebration of the bloodbath: “I think this is going to have a hell of a salutary effect on future prison riots.... Just like Kent State had a hell of a salutary effect” (referring to the 4 May 1970 National Guard killing of four students protesting the invasion of Cambodia—an extension of U.S. imperialism’s dirty war against the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants). Nixon added, “They can talk all they want about force, but that is the purpose of force.”

Attica Nation

Thompson, a historian at the University of Michigan and expert on mass incarceration, is particularly motivated by prison reform. She notes that the immediate aftermath of the Attica revolt saw some improvements in food, medical care, clothing, mail censorship and number of showers permitted. However, as she points out, this was followed by an “unprecedented



prison in Auburn, New York, the prior year. The bitter anger that was about to explode at Attica was displayed 19 days earlier when word spread through the cells that prison authorities at California’s San Quentin prison had assassinated Black Panther Party member George Jackson on 21 August 1971. The next day, over 800 Attica inmates marched silently into breakfast wearing black armbands and held a fast in protest. California prison officials had targeted Jackson, along with W.L. Nolen and Hugo Pinell, for forging solidarity of black, Latino and white prisoners. New York officials were no less alarmed by the interracial unity growing among Attica’s inmates.

The prison revolt reflected the growing ferment and struggles taking place outside prison walls, not least the “black power” movement and radical protests against the war in Vietnam. Many of the black inmates identified with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) and Puerto Ricans looked to the Young Lords, which was inspired by the Panthers. Playing a leading role in the rebellion was Sam Melville, a white member of the Weather Underground who was serving 18 years for placing explosives in government buildings in protest against the war in Vietnam. As Thompson observes, the presence of such activists “offered Attica’s otherwise apolitical men—like [Frank] Big Black Smith—a new understanding of their discontents and a new language for articulating them.” Smith ended up leading the prisoners’ security force, made up



Getty

Butchers of Attica: President Richard Nixon (left) and New York governor Nelson Rockefeller meet at White House, September 1972.

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No. 25

Racist Police Terror U.S.A.

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backlash against all efforts to humanize prison conditions in America.”

Inmates today continue to be used as slave labor, face censorship of political literature and conditions at least as dehumanizing and sadistic, including the increasing use of solitary confinement—universally recognized as a form of torture. Brutality by prison guards is a daily fact of life, especially for the black and Latino victims disproportionately singled out for discipline.

The backlash to which Thompson refers is one expression of the bipartisan roll-back of the limited democratic gains for black people attained by the liberal-led civil rights movement. Its most glaring manifestation for the past three decades has been the mass incarceration of black people, largely a consequence of the “war on drugs.” This overt war on black people was accompanied by escalating cop terror against the ghettos and barrios.

Today’s plethora of drug laws is an outgrowth of the state repression under the “war on crime” kicked off by Democratic president Lyndon Johnson’s 1968 “Safe Streets Act” and Nixon’s 1970 “Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act” and carried on by Democratic and Republican administrations since. The number of people languishing in U.S. prisons and jails, 2.2 million, is six times what it was in 1971. The costs of maintaining this vast prison complex have led to calls for easing up on the war on drugs.

Prisons are the concentrated expression of the depravity of this society. They are a key instrument in coercing, torturing and brutalizing those who have been cast off as the useless residue of a system rooted in exploitation and racial oppression. The deindustrialization of much of the U.S. that began in the late 1960s drove millions of black people out of the workforce and into the ranks of the permanently outcast. In the calculations of the American bourgeoisie, a substantial part of the black population, who used to provide labor for the auto plants and steel mills, is simply written off as an expendable population. Having condemned black as well as Latino youth to desperate poverty, the rulers whipped up hysteria painting the ghettoized poor as criminal “superpredators,” whom cops can gun down with impunity, and for whom no sentence is too long, no prison conditions too harsh. This demonization of the black population has served to deepen the wedge between white and black workers in a period of virtually no class struggle.

Marxists support the struggle for any



demand that meets the immediate needs of prisoners. But under capitalism no reforms can fundamentally alter the repressive nature of the prisons. Along with the cops, military and courts, prisons are a pillar of the capitalist state, whose basic function is to maintain, through force or threat of force, the rule of the capitalist class and its economic exploitation of the working class. In the U.S., where racial oppression is at the core of the capitalist system, any alleviation of prison conditions must be linked to the fight against black oppression in general. We fight to *abolish* the prison system, which will be done only when the capitalist order—with its barbaric state institutions—is shattered by a proletarian socialist revolution that establishes a planned, collectivized economy with jobs and quality, integrated housing and education for all.

Thompson’s sympathies clearly lie with the Attica prisoners. Yet she evinces a soft spot for the prison guards, whom she sees as victims as well. Her poster boy for humanizing the guards is Mike Smith, a 22-year-old former machinist apparently liked by the prisoners and sympathetic to their demands. Smith, after being taken hostage by the prisoners, was shot by the cops and grievously wounded. Thompson writes, “Like so many other small town boys who had grown up in rural

New York Mike needed to make a living, and prisons were the going industry.” Thompson also gives voice to the guards taken hostage and the families of the ten of them whom Rockefeller’s assassins gunned down, who resent the fact that the surviving Attica prisoners won a paltry monetary settlement from the state after nearly three decades.

As Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky pointed out 85 years ago, the worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state is a bourgeois cop, not a worker, an admonition no less applicable to prison guards. As we noted at the time of the Attica massacre, “These despicable racist guards are despised even by the ruling class that cynically uses them. The governor not only served notice on the prisoners that rebellion does not pay, and rebellion linked with revolutionary ideas means certain death, but he had a message for the guards too: Keep the upper hand or else!”

The basic function of the prisons is lost on the liberal academic Thompson, whose call for prison reform envisions a commonality of interests between inmates and prison guards—a relationship akin to that of slave and overseer. In a 2011 paper, “Rethinking Working-Class Struggle Through the Lens of the Carceral State: Toward a Labor History of Inmates and

Guards,” she declares, “It is time once again for the American working class to pay attention to penal facilities as sites of productive labor and wage competition and to recognize that its destiny is tied in subtle but important ways to the ability of inmates as well as prison guards to demand fair pay and safe working conditions.” Thompson lauds the return of prison guards to municipal unions, such as the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

What, then, are “safe working conditions” for prison guards? In our 1971 article, we sharply criticized Jerry Wurf, the AFSCME president, as he threatened a “slowdown” by union guards after the Attica massacre:

“Wurf demanded more and better riot equipment—helmets, tear gas and masks, to be borrowed from police departments if necessary, and hiring of more guards. Yet he had the effrontery to maintain, ‘We’re not at war with the inmates; the state of New York is at war with them.’ What forces does the state of New York employ to make war on the inmates if not the cops and guards Wurf is happy to represent?... No union can represent both workers and the sworn servants of the capitalist class, the police and prison guards.”

The increasing prominence of cops and prison guards—workers’ class enemies—in the shrinking union movement underscores the need for ousting the pro-capitalist bureaucrats and forging a class-struggle leadership in the basic organs of workers struggle.

Three years before L.D. Barkley read out the Attica Brothers’ powerful declaration, striking black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, famously walked picket lines with signs declaring, “I am a man.” Today, the racist capitalist ruling class continues to treat black people as if they were less than human and their lives don’t matter. But there is a reservoir of social power in the organized working class, in which black workers, who make up the unions’ most loyal and militant sector, remain disproportionately represented. Under revolutionary leadership, black workers, who form an organic link to the anger of the oppressed ghetto poor, will play a vanguard role in the struggles of the entire U.S. working class. It is the purpose of the Spartacist League to build a workers party that links the fight for black freedom to the struggle for proletarian state power. Workers rule on a world scale will open the road to a communist future in which the modern instruments of incarceration and death will be discarded as relics of a decaying social order that deserved only to perish. ■

Syria...

(continued from page 8)

Under the title “Will the Left Hear the Cries from Aleppo?” (socialistworker.org, 19 October), the ISO’s Ashley Smith penned yet another apologia for the imperialists. This time, his main polemical target was Blumenthal, whom he denounces for laying bare the U.S. role in Syria. Having deceitfully painted the Sunni Islamist-dominated rebellion as a “pro-democracy uprising” and the “Syrian Revolution,” the ISO’s Smith complains: “Blumenthal focuses entirely on exposing the U.S., thereby letting the primary agents of counterrevolution in Syria—Assad and Russia—off the hook.” One can safely say that the ISO has never been guilty of such focus.

In fact, the ISO’s main problem with the U.S. imperialist rulers is that they have not intervened enough in Syria. Smith laments: “The U.S. withheld critical military support, for example blocking a shipment of anti-aircraft weapons that could have undermined the regime’s military advantage.” Reading Smith’s article, one gets the impression that the U.S. is barely playing a role in the Syrian conflict. In reality, as Blumenthal reports, USAID has committed nearly \$340 million for “supporting activities that pursue a peaceful transition to a democratic and stable Syria.” This is on top of the hundreds



USAID-backed Brazilian coup in 1964 installed General Humberto Castelo Branco (far left) as military dictator.

of millions of dollars the CIA has spent supplying and training rebel forces in the country. And all this is on top of the tens of thousands of bombs that the U.S. has dropped on Syria and Iraq in recent years.

The U.S. ruling class that the ISO alibis is responsible for some of history’s most gruesome crimes, including the destruction of Iraqi society through a decade of sanctions followed by the 2003 invasion and occupation, which has killed hundreds of thousands. Cities like Ramadi and Fallujah have been reduced to rubble. It is telling that just around the same time that the ISO launched its polemic against Blumenthal, Iraqi ground forces, backed by U.S. special ops and aerial bombard-

ment, launched their assault on Mosul to “liberate” that city from ISIS. Yet just like the pro-imperialist media from which the ISO takes its cue, Smith is silent about Mosul while he loudly condemns the horrors taking place in Aleppo. Thousands have been slaughtered in Mosul, including over 900 civilians, according to undoubtedly understated estimates by the UN in early December. At least 130,000 civilians have been displaced.

The ISO finds it “shocking” that Blumenthal exposed the White Helmets for the imperialist tools that they are, with Smith writing, “Just because Blumenthal can find an aid trail that leads back to the USAID doesn’t automatically mean

the group and its work are an extension of U.S. imperialism and its politics are molded to those of some of its funders.” It seems that the ISO needs to be reminded of the old adage: “He who pays the piper calls the tune.”

Since its establishment in 1961, USAID has worked hand in glove with the CIA. From its role in backing the bloody dictatorship of Humberto Castelo Branco in Brazil in 1964, to providing funds in the 1990s to Albert Fujimori’s mass sterilization campaign in Peru—in which some 300,000 indigenous women were forcibly sterilized—to aiding the junta campaigns of genocide against the Mayan peasants in Guatemala, the history of USAID continues to be written in blood.

The ISO’s pimping for U.S. imperialism in Syria is not a surprise. The organization’s political godfather, the late Tony Cliff of Britain, broke from the Trotskyist movement during the 1950-53 Korean War when he refused to defend the Soviet Union, China and North Korea against the counterrevolutionary war waged by “democratic” U.S. and British imperialism. The ISO supported the CIA-backed, woman-hating, anti-Soviet *mujahedin* forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. It cheered on the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92, a world-historic defeat for the international working class. The ISO was born of social-democratic anti-Communism and has always been in the camp of “democratic” imperialism. ■

Workers Party...

(continued from page 1)

class from exploitation under capitalism are inextricably tied to a struggle for black liberation through socialist revolution. There is no other way out for the oppressed in this country. The Spartacist League is dedicated to building a class-struggle, multiracial, revolutionary workers party to lead this necessary fight.

Today, our struggle is mainly ideological—to motivate Marxism against the purveyors of false perspectives that bind the labor movement and the oppressed to their exploiters and oppressors through the Democratic Party. The heaviest shackle on the workers movement is the bureaucratic trade-union misleadership, which serves as an agent of the bourgeoisie within the working class. AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka whines that Trump should see him and the unions he lords it over as “partners” in American capitalism, just as the Democrats did. It is precisely this policy of class collaboration, of renouncing the road of politically independent class struggle that has sapped the strength and numbers of the unions and helped ratchet up the rate of exploitation for the bosses. Even the most basic and immediate demands and rights of labor today can be won only through the methods of militant class struggle.

In the arena of electoral politics and protests, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have emerged to corral disillusioned Bernie Sanders supporters

Immigrants held in nightmarish conditions in a south Texas detention center, 2014. Obama administration deported over 2.5 million people, more than any other president.

Office of Rep. Henry Cuellar



bureaucracy, the DSA is a proven and dangerous opponent of everyone fighting for revolutionary social change.

Historically, there is a blood line between social-democratic defenders of capitalist class rule and authentic communists who fight to bring the working class to power through a thoroughgoing socialist revolution. When the working class contended to extend the 1917 Russian proletarian socialist revolution to Germany in 1918-19, the DSA’s political forebears in the German Social Democracy were responsible for the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht and thus beheaded the revolutionary leadership of the workers movement. Closer to home, the right wing of the American social democracy supported the Vietnam War after even Richard Nixon had given it up. The “Left Wing of the Possible,” the DSA’s Michael Harrington, threw out the leftist youth who forged Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) because they had the audacity to trash their elders’ Cold War ban on communists.

That the DSA is a pole of attraction for anti-Trump protesters is an indication of the low level of political consciousness in this period. Leon Trotsky,

co-leader with Lenin of the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia, observed that reactionary periods give rise to “monstrous ideological relapses. Senile thought seems to have become infantile. In search of all-saving formulas the prophets in the epoch of decline discover anew doctrines long since buried by scientific socialism” (“Ninety Years of the Communist Manifesto,” 1937).

Other anti-communist social-democratic outfits, such as Socialist Alternative (SAlt), have put the old garbage of so-called “progressive” municipalism in new pails. SAlt’s idea of fighting for socialism was getting Kshama Sawant elected to the city

council in Seattle. In office, she espouses a common interest between landlords and tenants, urges cooperation with the chief of police and promotes the illusory economic justice of a paltry \$15.00 per hour minimum wage s-l-o-w-l-y phased in over many years!

This chimera of social-democratic oases at the local level is a 21st-century rerun of “sewer socialism.” At the end of the 19th century and early 20th century, reformists sought to give socialism a “respectable” veneer through local electoral campaigns, epitomized by Victor Berger’s Milwaukee section within the right wing of the Socialist Party. The rabidly white-supremacist Berger promoted a program of piecemeal reforms at the local level (from sewers to clean government) that in no way challenged capitalist rule.

There’s much talk among liberals and social democrats now about creating “sanctuary cities” against Trump’s threatened deportations of immigrants. One must ask: Where was their fervor when President Obama acted as *Deporter-in-Chief* and unleashed *la migra* to round up more immigrant workers and their families than his Republican predecessor? New York City mayor Bill de Blasio, a darling of the social democrats, promises his municipality as a sanctuary, yet presides over the “broken windows” law-and-order reign of terror that criminalizes and destroys the lives of black and Latino youth!

While the DSA openly rides (and hopes to steer) the Democratic Party bus, SAlt and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) serve as its spare tires. The ISO goes so far as to pay lip service to the need for an independent workers party, but in practice it builds support for bourgeois third parties like the Greens, whom they called to vote for in the recent election. The ISO prattles endlessly about fighting for “democracy.” But for genuine Marxists, it is ABC to understand that democracy under capitalism is a *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. SAlt still proffers Bernie Sanders as a socialist alternative, a capitalist politician whose “revolution” consisted of delivering all the votes he could muster to the imperialist hawk Hillary Clinton. (For a fuller analysis of the Sanders campaign, see “Bernie Sanders: Imperialist Running Dog,” WV No. 1083, 12 February 2016.) By propagating the myth of classless democracy, these leftists themselves become obstacles to revolutionary social change because they inculcate bourgeois ideology among youth, workers and the oppressed.

Often, leftists who seek to promote or pressure the Democratic Party do so in acts that dare not speak their name. They might not even mention the word “Democrat,” but you’ll hear a lot about “fight the right.” The understanding by implication is that you should support the Democratic Party because no explicit argument is made against it. This is business as usual for the Revolutionary Communist Party. In the guise of “RefuseFascism.org” it has run expensive, hysterically

urgent full-page ads and launched a campaign to “refuse to accept a fascist America.” But Trump was elected to office through the routine workings of bourgeois democracy. And in a period characterized by very little class struggle and a rollback of workers rights, the capitalist class has little need to organize and unleash extraparliamentary fascist bands. Racist law and order by the police is sufficient deadly terror in America today.

To be sure, bonafide KKK and Nazi fascists are emboldened by Trump’s win, but reformists peddle the lie that Trump in the White House equals fascism in order to prettify the Democrats. Try promoting the Democrats as a kinder, gentler option to the peoples across the Near East dying under Obama’s drone strikes and who were threatened with a whole lot more by Hillary Clinton. Black people across the U.S.A. are gunned down by cops in cities ruled by Democrats. Families are incarcerated in immigration detention centers and then torn apart through deportations under Democratic Party rule. The welfare benefits of mothers were “ended as we know it” by Bill Clinton. Abortion rights and access to birth control were further restricted under Barack Obama’s watch.

Hillary Clinton supporters spout, “I’m still with her!” as their slogan for a women’s march on Washington, but Clinton and Obama effectively say “I’m with him.” The women’s march is explicitly *not* anti-Trump. Stressing the continuity of the imperial presidency, Obama said of Trump, “we’re on the same team.”

At the root of every opportunist appetite and impulse expressed by our political opponents is hostility to working-class rule and a steadfast conviction that the capitalist profit system can be reformed to work in the interests of the oppressed. Time is running out on this planet for reruns of this proven lie. As Rosa Luxemburg said, the stark choice is “socialism or barbarism.”

The inequalities of this society are rooted in the capitalist system based on private property and exploitation of the labor of the many for the profit of the few. To eradicate every form of injustice requires a thoroughgoing socialist revolution to create a society in which those who labor rule through soviets, or workers committees, in an egalitarian socialist society based on a collectivized, planned economy. In view of U.S. imperialism’s unrivaled military might, and the terror and destruction it wreaks worldwide, our struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party in America is crucial for the future of humanity.

In this centennial year of the 1917 Russian Revolution, it is necessary to reassert the struggle for authentic Marxism. The final undoing of the Russian Revolution after decades of Stalinist misrule and hostile imperialist encirclement has emboldened the U.S. bourgeoisie’s appetite for world domination, while proletarian consciousness internationally has been thrown back. And yet, communism is America’s last, best hope. The Spartacist League is committed to building the revolutionary workers party to achieve this purpose. ■



December 2: Klansmen in North Carolina, on eve of KKK caravan to celebrate Trump’s election.

and others scared shitless by Trump into the dead end of revitalizing the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is the other party of the capitalist ruling class. It more successfully mobilizes the population behind U.S. imperialism’s depredations abroad and successfully subordinates labor and minorities at home by tying them to the bourgeois state through the myth of classless “democracy.” The DSA may present a youthful mien in publications like *Jacobin*, but its political message is a timeworn program of anti-working class betrayal. *Caveat emptor*: committed members of the Democratic Party and entrenched in the union

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Russia...

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countries across Latin America, including Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. After World War II, Washington was behind the coups that ousted Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. The CIA-linked National Endowment for Democracy funded groups opposed to Putin during Russia’s 2012 elections, which reportedly has the Russian president still fuming.

The bourgeois media that is now howling about Russian hacking has long promoted the CIA as the pinnacle of veracity. Founded in 1947, at the onset of the Cold War, that agency has provided the lies to justify every one of U.S. imperialism’s unending stream of wars from Korea and Vietnam through Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Including 14 years ago when it provided the “proof” that Saddam Hussein had accrued an arsenal of “weapons of mass destruction.”

Instead of providing any actual evidence of Putin’s role in hacking the Democratic National Committee and Clinton’s campaign chairman (which John McCain labeled “an act of war”), the intelligence chiefs engaged in some classic bait and switch, directing their main attention to RT, a Russian English-language news outlet that few Americans watch. RT’s coverage of Clinton, the report tells us, “was consistently negative and focused on her leaked emails and accused her of corruption, poor physical and mental health and ties to Islamic extremism.” How was that different from Fox News? The report also has the temerity to complain: “RT has also focused on criticism of the US economic system, US currency policy, alleged Wall Street greed, and the US national debt.” Americans hardly need RT to tell them about the depredations of the U.S. economic system, Washington and Wall Street.

Barack Obama, who has evidently been “trumped” by Putin in Syria, was quick to endorse the intelligence findings. At the same time, the president made clear that the full version of the exposé will not be available for popular consumption since it would reveal the ever-so-secret methods employed by U.S. operatives. The FBI managed for a while to maintain a skeptical attitude toward the findings of the CIA and NSA. It recently caved in to pressures to join the chorus, perhaps reflecting its director’s desire to maintain his security clearance. Trump voters are hardly alone in remaining decidedly unconvinced by the supposed revelations, in spite of the patriotic hue and cry.

In fact, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote but lost the election. The responsibility for this quite undemocratic result lies entirely with the U.S. Constitution and its Electoral College, an institution created by the “founding fathers” to give disproportionate power to the slaveowning states. To quote the memorable cartoon character Pogo, “We have met the enemy and he is us.” For our part, as Marxists we are equally opposed to any candidates for public office of the bourgeois parties—Democrats, Republicans and Greens—while fighting against all attacks on the right to vote.

It is immaterial whether the alleged hackers were mobilized by Vladimir Putin or the tooth fairy, as in this instance no attack on voting rights occurred. The real undermining of voting rights in the U.S. starts with mass incarceration, especially of black people and Latinos, and the denial of their right to vote. It continues with the gutting of the 1965 Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court in 2013 and the subsequent barrage of voter ID laws and other anti-voting measures passed by mostly Republican-controlled statehouses.

Hacking foreign governments is the stock in trade of all spy agencies. The espionage operations of the U.S. imperialists are especially devoted to this pursuit, sparing no one, including loyal allies like German chancellor Angela Merkel. Domestically, especially since 9/11, the

U.S. government has arrogated to itself the right to monitor everyone’s emails and other personal communications. At the same time, the “right” to proscribe all leaks and exposures has been a special obsession of the Obama presidency.

In the eyes of liberal pundits who portray skepticism of the recent intelligence report as apostasy, the real “crime against democracy” is that the information gathered by hacking was released to the public. No doubts have been raised about its accuracy or authenticity. The leaks merely revealed a portion of the wheelings, dealings and hypocrisy of Clinton and her campaign staff. As Julian Assange noted during a January 9 press conference: “If WikiLeaks had an effect it’s because people read the words of Hillary Clinton and her team and didn’t like what they saw.” Bourgeois democracy evidently demands that its subjects be kept ignorant of the machinations of their leaders.

Indeed, control of information by the capitalist class—through its control of the education system, the press and mass media—is vital to the normal workings of bourgeois democracy, a fig leaf for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Elections under bourgeois democracy allow the oppressed masses to “choose” who will subjugate them during the next few years.



Ultimately, domination by the capitalist rulers is ensured through the armed might of the military, the police and the prisons, which together constitute the core of the capitalist state.

The hysteria the Democrats desire to provoke against the fictional war on democracy is simply to cover with jingoist bluster their failure to retain control of the White House, regain control of the Senate or end the ongoing losses of state legislative seats. This has had some impact on the gullible as many Democratic supporters were reportedly willing to believe that the ballot boxes had been hacked.

The diplomatic sanctions against Russia recently put in place by Obama are the cosmetic and fairly routine measures employed by states to signal their displeasure with each other. Not so those put in place almost three years ago to punish Putin for the actions he took in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Those sanctions have exacerbated Russian economic difficulties that were set off by the decline of world oil prices. All these sanctions are an expression of U.S. imperialism’s diktats and must be opposed.

The confrontation with Putin over Ukraine was touched off by the February 2014 fascist-spearheaded coup in Kiev that was engineered by Washington with the assistance of the European Union. With the overwhelming support of the ethnic Russian majority in Crimea, historically



January 7, Bremerhaven, Germany: U.S. Army tanks and armored howitzers, among over 2,500 military vehicles in transit to East Europe. NATO is aggressively increasing its forces in countries on Russia’s doorstep.

part of Russia, Putin moved to reclaim the peninsula the following month, an action we supported. In the ethnically mixed but predominantly Russian-speaking provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, militants fighting government and fascist attacks

ral resources. Yet it remains essentially a regional capitalist power. Where imperialist countries are characterized by the export of capital, Russia mainly exports oil and other natural resources as well as armaments. The imperialists intervene militarily throughout the world in their drive to control markets, raw materials and cheap labor. Moscow’s main military campaigns, with the exception of Syria, have been within the borders of the former Soviet Union: above all, two brutal wars in Chechnya to prevent the oppressed Chechens from asserting their right to secede, a right that we support.

Trump is no less committed than the Cold Warriors and neocons—from Hillary Clinton to John McCain—to expanding, prosecuting and enforcing the dominance of U.S. imperialism. That is the real content of Trump’s promise to make America great again. Trump’s obsession is to conduct the orchestra; he cares little about the program as long as it promises to further American might. While his opponents fret about whether “fake news” stories influenced the electorate, Trump wants to throw flag burners in prison, the First Amendment be damned. Meanwhile, he appears intent on acquiring many more megatons of nuclear explosive capacity as he charges off to duel with those he perceives as America’s enemies.

The recent U.S. elections revealed the widespread contempt the citizenry has for the governmental administrators of the capitalist system. However, this is not a threat to that system absent a proletarian-centered social upheaval led by a revolutionary working-class party. The model for such a revolutionary transformation is the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. It is necessary to abandon all illusions in lesser-evil nostrums and commit to the building of a workers party that embraces the traditions and intent of the Bolsheviks to overthrow the imperialist order through international socialist revolution. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Syrian “White Helmets”: Tools of U.S. Imperialism

When the Netflix “documentary” *The White Helmets* was released in September, it was greeted with rousing fanfare. The White Helmets, popularly identified by their headgear, are promoted as humanitarian heroes who are lauded for their claims to have saved tens of thousands of lives from the rubble of the Syrian civil war. The *Wall Street Journal* hailed them as “White Knights for Desperate Syrians.” The *New York Times*’ Nicholas Kristof gushed over them as “a reminder of the human capacity for courage, strength and resilience.” The London *Guardian* lobbied for their nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. Secretary of State John Kerry hailed them as “brave 1st responders on the scene.” George Clooney is planning to make a movie about them. Hollywood shortlisted the Netflix documentary for an Oscar nomination.

The slickly produced Netflix film is principally a “feel good” propaganda hoax aimed at manipulating public perception about the civil war in Syria and popularizing imperialist intervention. The White Helmets are presented as impartial, ordinary citizen volunteers with no political agenda, motivated only by the lofty motto: “To save a life is to save all of humanity.” Absent from the documentary is any mention of their origin or how they acquire their funds and equipment. Several scenes show them training in southern Turkey, with no explanation of how a group of Syrian civilian volunteers were able to cross back and forth over that border.

But there have also been a number of online articles exposing who these people really are. Most notably, Max Blumenthal, an award-winning journalist and author of *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, published a two-part series on alternet.org last October that clearly demonstrated the true nature of the forces behind the White Helmets. The organization was founded in 2013 by James Le Mesurier, a former British army officer and a veteran of NATO interventions in Kosovo and Bosnia who subsequently established a career in the murky world of mercenary organizations like Blackwater. The group’s members were trained to film themselves rushing into bombed buildings to extract survivors while also recording the destruction meted out by the Syrian regime. Such footage, which forms a large part of the Netflix documentary, is disseminated to the world to promote “humanitarian” imperialist military intervention to overthrow the brutal regime of Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad.

As Marxists, we have no side in the grisly civil war, which has claimed some 400,000 lives and displaced half the country’s population. However, we say that workers internationally do have a side *against* military intervention by the U.S. and other imperialists. It is these forces that have stoked the flames of the war by providing material and logistical support to the anti-Assad forces. Thus, while we are die-hard opponents of everything the reactionary cutthroats of ISIS stand for, we are for the military defense of ISIS against the imperialists’ armed forces and their proxies in the region. These include the Syrian Kurdish nationalists as well as, in Iraq, the Baghdad government, the Shia militias and the Kurdish *pesh merga*—who have all been acting as the ground troops of the U.S. military intervention.



Liveleak

Left: Video shows “White Helmets” at execution of a man by Al Nusra in northern Aleppo. Below: Raed Saleh, head of White Helmets, being honored by imperialist patrons, German (left) and French (right) foreign ministers, December 1.



AFP

At the same time, we also oppose the other capitalist powers involved in Syria—such as Russia, Iran and Turkey—and demand that they get out.

As Marxist opponents of imperialism, we recognize that any setback for Washington coincides with the interests of the international proletariat, both in the Near East and, crucially, here in the U.S. We aim to turn the multisided disillusionment and anger of working people in the U.S. into class struggle against their capitalist rulers. It is through such struggle that the proletariat can be won to the need to build a revolutionary workers party that will lead the fight for socialist revolution to destroy the imperialist beast from within.

From the beginning, the White Helmets scheme was funded by various imperialist powers, including Britain’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which to date has shelled out some 32 million pounds (over \$40 million). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has given out another \$23 million through its Office of Transitional Initiatives (i.e., its office of regime change). Japan and several European countries have also sent financial aid to the group.

The White Helmets serve as a vehicle for a shadowy public relations outfit called the Syria Campaign, which presents itself as a “non-political” campaign for regular Syrian citizens that is dedicated to civilian protection. But, as Blumenthal writes, “Behind the lofty rhetoric about solidarity and the images of heroic rescuers rushing in to save lives is an agenda that aligns closely with the forces from Riyadh to Washington clamoring for regime change.” The Syria Campaign has organized demonstrations and mobilized pressure for Western intervention to overthrow Assad. *The White Helmets* docu-

mentary itself, according to Blumenthal, “appears to be at least partly the handiwork of the Syria Campaign.”

One of the key calls of both the Syria Campaign and the White Helmets is the imposition of a no-fly zone in Syria. Visitors to the White Helmets’ website are promptly greeted with a request by its leader, Raed Saleh, to sign a petition for a no-fly zone. In May 2015, Saleh met with UN and European officials to push the same, while his colleague Farouq Habib testified before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs in support of such a zone. The imposition of a no-fly zone in Syria would not only be directed against Assad; it would also potentially

pose war with Russia, which has provided crucial air support to the Syrian regime. Thus, Washington is currently reluctant to impose such a zone.

As for the White Helmets, who operate exclusively in territory held by anti-regime forces including the Islamic State (ISIS), they have been seen in videos and photographs posing triumphantly on the corpses of Syrian government soldiers and boasting about discarding their body parts in the trash. One video shows them with jihadist fighters celebrating under the flag of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Al Nusra Front (now calling themselves Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) after a defeat of Syrian troops. A particularly disturbing video shows the execution of a man in civilian clothes in northern Aleppo by an Al Nusra member, and then two members of the White Helmets immediately wrapping up his body.

The Syrian civil war has seen plenty of atrocities committed against civilians by *all* sides, from minorities slaughtered or driven out of their villages and towns by various rebels, to the bombing of Aleppo by Russian and Syrian forces as they retook the city. With Donald Trump moving into the White House and promising to “work together” with Russia, it is unclear whether or how U.S. policy will shift regarding Syria. The bottom line for Marxists is the understanding that U.S. imperialism is the greatest enemy of working people and the oppressed around the world.

ISO: PR Agents for the White Helmets

That a supposedly civilian rescue group in war-torn Syria has received tens of millions in aid from the imperialist powers while its leaders are being feted by Western governments and the United Nations (UN) should tell you that something stinks. We have many political differences with Blumenthal, but we appreciate the work he did in getting the dirt on the White Helmets. Not so the reformist International Socialist Organization (ISO), which has a long history of supporting U.S. imperialism’s aims, including in Syria (see “ISO on Syria: Pimps for U.S. Imperialism,” WV No. 1097, 7 October).

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Reuters

Mosul, Iraq: Terrified civilians flee after U.S.-led coalition airstrike, November 17.