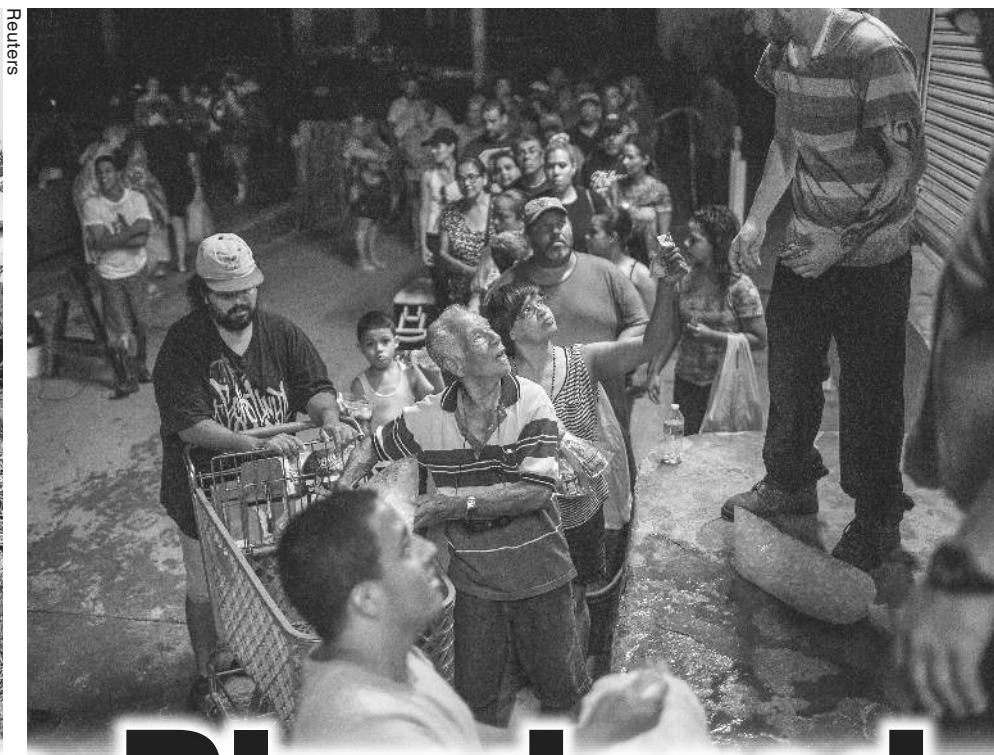


Hurricanes and Man-Made Disasters



Puerto Rico Plundered by U.S. Colonialism

Puerto Rico lies devastated, its residents struggling to obtain the very essentials of life: food, drinking water, medicine, fuel, electricity, sanitation and shelter. There is nothing natural about this unfolding catastrophe. Long before Hurricane Maria made landfall, U.S. colonial domination had bled Puerto Rico to the point of collapse. The island of three and a half million people, today in more than \$70 billion debt bondage to Wall Street vultures, was deprived of infrastructure and resources, left destitute, vulnerable and unable to cope with the mighty storms that tear through the Caribbean.

Presented with deep-going suffering and desperation, Washington responded how it knows best: with gunboats and a military occupation. A three-star general, Jeffrey Buchanan, has been placed in charge of the “relief” efforts. By the end of the first week, over 7,000 U.S. troops had arrived in Puerto Rico, including over 1,000 marines and sailors on two amphibious assault ships off the island’s coast. National Guardsmen were patrolling urban streets, while other soldiers engaged in clearing operations. The 101st Airborne Division, elite killers known for suppressing major civil unrest, like in 1967 black Detroit, are flying Blackhawk helicopters over San Juan.

The huge Roosevelt Roads naval base was even reopened as a staging area. It had been decommissioned shortly after the Pentagon in 2003 opted to abandon its long-time training grounds on nearby Vieques, where military exercises and relentless bombing provoked angry protests over the years. Those exercises pose dangers to this day. Two months ago, the unannounced detonation of explosives on Vieques by the U.S. Navy exposed residents to toxic fumes. We say: *U.S. troops out!*

Left: Devastation in Puerto Rico. Hurricanes destroyed homes, infrastructure across the island. Right: People without access to water line up to buy ice.

With shelters running out of supplies and long lines for what little there is, the armed forces were mobilized primarily to assert control over the island and to contain any social outburst. Paving the way for military rule is what the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is all about. When FEMA, now part of Homeland Security, was in its infancy, Reagan administration officials made plans for it to set up the infrastructure for military dictatorship in the event of a “national emergency.”

True to form, days passed before FEMA bothered to contact some mayors of Puerto Rican cities, and even then 10,000 shipping containers full of food and other aid continued to sit undistributed at the Port of San Juan. When the capital city’s mayor sharply criticized FEMA for perpetuating suffering, Trump shot back with racist arrogance typical of the U.S. rulers, lambasting the victims as “politically motivated ingrates” who “want everything to be done for them.” The federal government’s criminal indifference toward the lives of U.S. imperialism’s Spanish-speaking, dark-skinned colonial subjects recalls the rulers’ treatment of black people in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Democratic Party politicians, shedding crocodile tears for the plight of the Puerto Rican people, have enjoined the Trump administration to “do more”—that is, beef up the military intervention. Typical is a September 27 letter to Trump

from 145 Congressional Democrats urging the deployment of the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in order to, among other things, quell supposed “looting and crime” at the hands of “armed gangs.” Governor Andrew Cuomo of New York (where there are almost one and a quarter million people of Puerto Rican descent) is bragging about the humanitarian supplies that the state has sent to Puerto Rico... along with over 150 state troopers and National Guardsmen for law enforcement.

While U.S. troops have participated in “search and rescue” and have distributed some food and supplies, their main function is not to help the island’s population but to impose reactionary “law and order.” They are to hunt down “looters,” in reality survivors foraging for life’s necessities, especially those who go out after dark. An extended nighttime curfew, a precursor of martial law, was imposed from the first by right-wing Puerto Rican governor Ricardo Rosselló. That flunky of the imperialists has also pleaded for a greater U.S. military presence in order to head off “a mass exodus” to the mainland. Washington could not agree more with that objective and has stationed military personnel at the commercial airports.

The Democrats and Republicans, both capitalist parties, represent one of the biggest looters the world has ever known: the U.S. imperialist ruling class. Ever since 1898, when control of Puerto Rico was

wrested from Spain through war, it has pillaged the wealth of the island. Washington’s Puerto Rican colony has served successively as a naval coaling station, a sugar-baron empire, a low-wage manufacturing base, a corporate tax haven, and now a target for parasitic hedge funds. With nearly half the population living below the official poverty line, working people have overwhelmingly shouldered the cost, as they will for whatever passes as rebuilding under the watch of the U.S. profiteers.

In their various statements on the disaster, the Democrats have taken to reminding themselves, and the country, that Puerto Rico’s inhabitants are U.S. citizens. In fact, under the present commonwealth arrangement, Puerto Ricans are oppressed *second-class* citizens who cannot vote in presidential elections and are not represented in Congress, but who have been drafted in disproportionate numbers for U.S. imperialism’s wars. That citizenship was first conferred a century ago, in order to press some 20,000 Puerto Ricans into service as cannon fodder in World War I.

Even today, the minimal political rights and paltry federal assistance granted to Puerto Ricans provide a thin gloss on colonial exploitation. Puerto Ricans are prohibited from managing their own economy, negotiating their own trade relations and controlling their own currency. Although by and large fed up with the current commonwealth relationship, Puerto Ricans have expressed contradictory views toward independence. On the one hand, people on the island have a very strong national identity informed

continued on page 2

U.S. Troops Out! Cancel the Debt! For the Right of Independence!



Puerto Rico...

(continued from page 1)

by a long history of anti-colonial struggle, which the U.S. imperialists have brutally suppressed, including by murdering, imprisoning and torturing *independen-tistas*. On the other, many fear losing the ability to live and work on the mainland and of sinking further into poverty. After the hurricane, by all accounts, many Puerto Ricans view getting off the island as their only chance for a future.

As intransigent opponents of national oppression and U.S. imperialism, we favor independence for Puerto Rico. However, in upholding the right of self-determination, should Puerto Ricans decide they want statehood, we would support the will of the population, just as we would oppose any attempts to forcibly impose independence. Thus, we stress the *right* of independence for Puerto Rico.

Whatever the final sum spent on rebuilding the island, it will be a drop in the bucket of the total needed to truly modernize Puerto Rico. There is no percentage in that for the U.S. ruling class, which in general invests only what it can realize back in profit. Puerto Rico has to escape the colonial straitjacket to even begin to address the needs of the working class and the poor.

A fight to cast off colonial oppression will by its very nature run up against local agents of the imperialists like Rosselló, who have enforced austerity on behalf of their U.S. overlords. With the working class at its head, such a fight could prove a springboard to the smashing of capitalist rule on the island and would be a powerful leaven for class struggle across the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as on the U.S. mainland, where millions of

Puerto Ricans reside. If workers were to first seize power in the U.S., they would immediately grant independence and massive aid to Puerto Rico.

Capitalist Profiteering and Colonial Subjugation

In his first post-Maria tweet on Puerto Rico, Trump reminded the world that U.S. bankers and financial speculators will still need to collect on the territory’s massive debt. In so doing, he was continuing the work of his predecessor. Last year, the Obama administration appointed a fiscal control board, widely reviled as the “junta colonial,” to slash the island’s spending—and break union contracts and sell off public assets in the process.

This instrument of colonial subjugation has ruthlessly enforced austerity, including by cutting health care expenditure by 30 percent, closing hundreds of schools and lowering the minimum wage to \$4 an hour for people under 25 years old. With Puerto Rican society now in a state of near total collapse, the unelected board approved \$1 billion for relief efforts, but the money was merely reallocated from other parts of the budget. Additional planned anti-worker measures, like furloughs and pension cuts, remain on the table.

The island’s U.S. creditors are even angling to profit further off the mass misery, as documented in an *Intercept* article (27 September) titled “Puerto Rican Debt Holders Respond to Catastrophic Hurricane by Offering Puerto Rico More Debt.” The debt was a crushing weight on Puerto Rican workers even before the present disaster. Early estimates for the cost of rebuilding the island would double the debt. Workers in the U.S. have an obligation to side with their Puerto Rican class brothers and



San Juan, November 1950: Police and National Guard detain political prisoners following island-wide revolts for independence. More than 3,000 people were arrested within a matter of days.

sisters against the common class enemy. To clear the path for their Puerto Rican brothers and sisters to recover from social disaster, workers in the U.S. must demand: *Cancel the debt!*

The U.S. capitalist rulers have plundered the island without stop for more than a century. Witness the Jones Act shipping restrictions, which the Trump administration did not temporarily waive until eight days after Maria. Enacted in 1920, this protectionist legislation mandates that all “coastwise” shipping, including between the mainland and Puerto Rico, must be on U.S. vessels, or face high tariffs and fees that are passed on to the Puerto Rican population. This price-fixing scheme for U.S. shipping magnates contributed to the island’s economic crisis. Thanks to the legislation, the price of goods from the mainland is at least double that in neighboring islands, and the cost of living in impoverished Puerto Rico is higher than in most U.S. cities. That means materials needed for hurricane preparation and recovery, from storm windows to generators, are for many priced out of reach.

Perhaps the greatest testament to U.S. colonial pillage, though, is the decrepit state of the electrical utility, PREPA. With the deindustrialization of the island in the 1990s, U.S. capital lost its primary incentive to ensure the upkeep of this

crucial infrastructure. Over subsequent years, many of the generation and distribution systems became dangerously outmoded. Saddled with billions in debt, PREPA increasingly skimped on preventative maintenance. This corner-cutting included foregoing annual safety inspections of dams, including the one at Guajataca now on the verge of failing.

By the end of last year, Puerto Ricans were experiencing more than four times as many electrical outages as the average U.S. customer, while paying higher rates than in any state except Hawaii. According to the electrical workers union, UTIER, the utility intentionally degraded service to prime the pump for privatization. Many skilled workers were forced out through retirement and emigration. Then, the glancing blow of Irma turned off most lights, PREPA delayed restoration to build support for a corporate sell-off, and Maria finished the job.

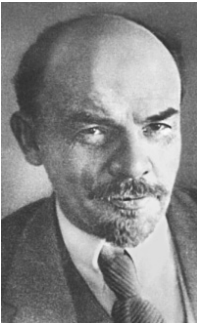
Some of Puerto Rico’s creditors prefer PREPA to simply restructure its debt and pass the cost on to consumers (for decades). Other bourgeois elements view a fire sale to private bidders as an opportunity, not least to completely smash UTIER, which before the shuttering of industry was in the vanguard of the combative proletariat on the island. Over the last 15 years,



TROTSKY

Self-Determination and Socialist Revolution

In many of his writings, V.I. Lenin emphasized that the fight of subjugated peoples against their national oppression was a necessary link in the struggle of the international working class for socialist revolution. Lenin’s intransigent fight for the self-determination of nations, that is, the right to separate and establish an independent state, was crucial for the Bolshevik Party in winning the confidence of the various nationalities imprisoned within the tsarist empire.



LENIN

Not only the right of nations to self-determination, but *all* the fundamental demands of political democracy are only partially “practicable” under imperialism, and then in a distorted form and by way of exception (for example, the secession of Norway from Sweden in 1905). The demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies that is put forward by all revolutionary Social-Democrats is also “impracticable” under capitalism without a series of revolutions. But from this it does not by any means follow that Social-Democracy should reject the immediate and most determined struggle for *all* these demands—such a rejection would only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and reaction—but, on the contrary, it follows that these demands must be formulated and put through in a revolutionary and not a reformist manner, going beyond the bounds of bourgeois legality, breaking them down, going beyond speeches in parliament and verbal protests, and drawing the masses into decisive action, extending and intensifying the struggle for every fundamental democratic demand up to a direct proletarian onslaught on the bourgeoisie, i.e., up to the socialist revolution that expropriates the bourgeoisie....

Increased national oppression under imperialism does not mean that Social-Democracy should reject what the bourgeoisie call the “utopian” struggle for the freedom of nations to secede but, on the contrary, it should make greater use of the conflicts that arise in this sphere, *too*, as grounds for mass action and for revolutionary attacks on the bourgeoisie.

—V.I. Lenin, “The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination” (January-February 1916)

WORKERS VANGUARD

Marxist Working-Class Biweekly of the Spartacist League of the U.S.

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The closing date for news in this issue is October 3.

No. 1119

6 October 2017

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Spartacist League Forums

100 Years of the Russian Revolution

For New October Revolutions!

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, October 7, 3 p.m.

322 West 48th Street, Manhattan First Floor

(Between 8th and 9th Avenues—Take A, C or E to 42nd Street)

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

LOS ANGELES

Saturday, October 14, 5 p.m.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church*

3300 Wilshire Boulevard

(At Berendo St., 2 blocks west of Wilshire/Vermont stop on Red/Purple Line)

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

*The views expressed by the participants are not necessarily those of the Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

BAY AREA

Saturday, October 21, 2 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church of Oakland

2619 Broadway, Oakland

(Entrance on 27th St.)

Information: (510) 839-0851 slbayarea@fastmail.net

CHICAGO

Saturday, November 4, 2 p.m.

Chicago Public Library

Roosevelt Branch

1101 W. Taylor Street

(UIC-Halsted Blue Line)

Information: (312) 563-0441 chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

2

WORKERS VANGUARD

Our comrade Ed Cliffel died in Orlando, Florida, at the age of 78. At his side were his wife, Linda, and daughter Lauren. Also, two comrades were sent to be with him in his final hours. Ed had been in New York assisting *Workers Vanguard* and the central party leadership when he became gravely ill and had to be hospitalized. He died on September 23, only three weeks after a diagnosis of aggressive metastatic cancer.

Edward James Cliffel was born in Cleveland on 28 August 1939 and grew up in a working-class family. In a 2012 interview, recorded as part of a younger comrade's oral history project aimed at preserving the experiences and knowledge of senior party cadre, he described his family's politics as "right-wing Catholic" and anti-Communist. He was moved by the injustice of his father's life—just working and sleeping—and thought the working class deserved better. In 1957, he enrolled at Case Institute of Technology but left two years later after getting involved in other pursuits—mainly politics but also playing bridge. Having worked as a postal worker for a year and a half, Ed then returned to education, eventually earning a master's degree in psychology. His professional knowledge and understanding of people were invaluable to the party in many situations. His job was psychology, but Ed's profession was communist politics.

Ed was a leader of our organization for nearly four and a half decades. He was elected an alternate member of the Spartacist League Central Committee (CC) in 1977. He was a member of the Central Control Commission from 1980 to 1983. He became a full CC member in 1983 and served in that capacity until his death. Ed became a full member of the International Executive Committee (IEC) of the ICL beginning in 1992. He took a hard stand in defense of Leninism on the national question in the fight leading up to our Seventh International Conference earlier this year (see *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 65, Summer 2017). He actively participated in that conference, even as he was recovering from open-heart surgery, and became a consultative member of the IEC.

Ed joined the party in 1973 as part of a fusion process between the Spartacist League and the Cleveland Marxist Caucus (CMC). At 34 years old, he was older than most of those we were recruiting at that time. While many of those who burned with revolutionary fervor during those tumultuous years of anti-racist and antiwar struggles soon returned to the more comfortable options available to them, Ed was steadfast in placing his life in the service of his communist convictions.

The Cleveland Marxist Caucus was a loose collective of friends and sometime cothinkers who were moving toward systematic study of Marxism. The political origins of the CMC members lay in the breakup of the New Left, coming individually from the Cleveland Students for a Democratic Society, the Movement for a Democratic Society and Weatherman. Other members came out of the Cleveland women's liberation movement.

In this period, the SL and its youth organization had a number of regroupments with local New Leftist groupings that were studying Marxism and becoming convinced of the need for a revolutionary party. One of these was the Buffalo Marxist Caucus, which had ties with and strongly influenced the CMC. Our fusion with the Buffalo Marxist Caucus in November 1972 paved the way for winning Ed and other CMC members, including his lifelong friend and comrade, Corky.

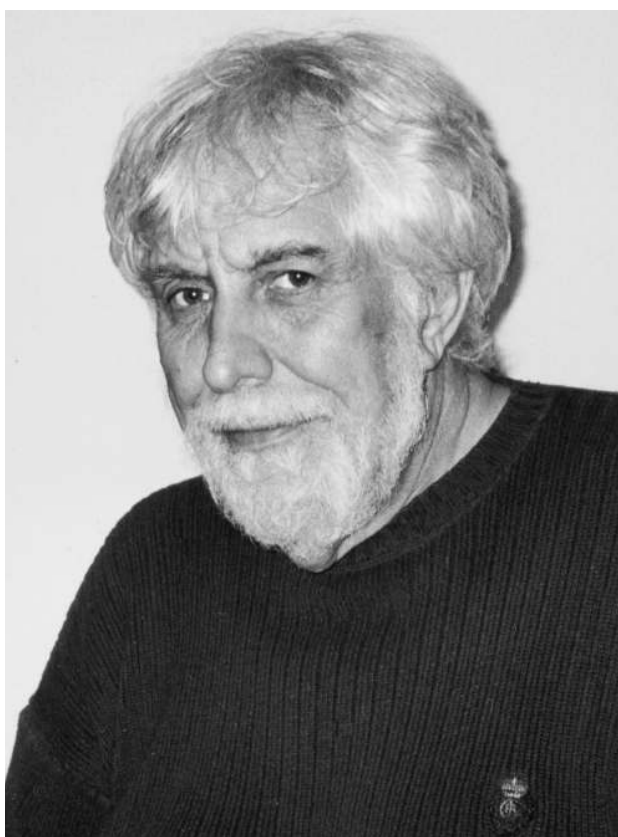
Ed authored the article for WV that described the CMC's roots and its process of fusion:

"The group's definitive break with New Leftism, opening the door to development on the basis of Marxism, thus came from the piecemeal recognition that isolated sectors of the oppressed, organized around struggles for immediate needs, do not automatically come to socialist conclusions. The group's illusions as to the revolutionary potential of the lumpenized 'community' dwindled as the destructive effects of lumpenization were realized. Such struggles do not spontaneously come together and unite in socialist revolution...but must be *united* behind the class struggle of the workers through the agency of a mass, working-class vanguard party."

—"Cleveland Workers Vanguard Committee Formed," WV No. 17, March 1973

As a party member, Ed moved from Cleveland to New York in 1974. He played a leading role in the NYC

Edward Cliffel



WV Photo



1939–2017

local, including as education director, and wrote for the party press. Ed transferred to Chicago in March 1979 and, over time, became the central political leader of that local. A frequent and effective public spokesman, Ed was the SL's presenter at a formal debate with the Chicago-based Sojourner Truth Organization in 1981 on "The Polish Events and the Russian Question." The account in WV No. 275 (27 February 1981) includes extensive quotes from Ed's remarks—he wiped the floor with his anti-Soviet opponent.

Comrade Ed possessed a keen understanding of the U.S. and its peculiarities, of the many ways in which black oppression has been and remains at the core of American history and political life. In a 1995 exchange with an official of the International Association of Machinists who defended the union bureaucracy's chauvinist protectionism, Ed skewered the union tops:

"The class collaborationism of the union officialdom has sapped the organized strength of the working class. Nor is that all. The savage attacks on the living standards of working people and on the very ability of

the poor and helpless to live, the slashing of health care at all levels, the McJobs and empty futures of youth, the rampant racist attacks and massive incarceration of blacks (a social agenda neatly fitting with that of the Ku Klux Klan) are, no less, the products of this treacherous collaboration. Those who you defend, with the bosses, have made this bed. Others, however, must sleep in it."

—"Exchange on Boeing Strike,"

WV No. 634, 1 December 1995

Ed was arguably WV's best writer, and drafted many of our front-page articles. His prose was always eloquent and persuasive, drawing on a broad range of sources—from Shakespeare and the King James Bible to popular movies. He presented complex issues concisely and often with mordant humor. His knowledge was wide-ranging, as reflected in his incisive remarks in meetings and contributions to our internal bulletins.

To cite one example, Ed was instrumental in strengthening our programmatic understanding of the Chinese deformed workers state. In 1997, he initiated a discussion on a formulation that had appeared in *Spartacist* which defended "the right of independence for a Tibetan *soviet* republic." Ed pointed out that there was no objective basis for an independent soviet Tibet, one of the most backward and inaccessible regions on earth. By offering such an illusory perspective, we were making a "curtsy toward 'human-rights'-led counterrevolution," i.e., the Tibetan "independence" movement of the Dalai Lama and his imperialist sponsors. Ed was right and was the author of an article correcting the line in the *Spartacist* piece. It was published in WV No. 695 (28 August 1998) under the headline "'Free Tibet': Rallying Cry for Counterrevolution in China."

Ed was a presence, his booming laugh irresistible. He was a voracious reader of everything, from politics and history to science, poetry and literature,

and enjoyed a wide range of music—classical, jazz, Sinatra, Meat Loaf. He thought outside the box and was one of the most creative, independent and critical Marxist thinkers in our party. Ed was always looking for political discussion and debate—usually over copious amounts of alcohol. His mind was brilliant and his spirit was kindly belligerent; his gusto for life was Falstaffian. He had a deep sense of the human condition. In his public political work, people of every background quickly opened up to him.

Ed's death is a great loss to the ICL. It is an indescribable diminution of our collective knowledge, culture and political understanding. We extend our condolences to Linda, Ed's companion for 45 years, and Lauren. Linda has told us that Ed used to say, "My one wish is to die a communist." Indeed, Ed lived as he had wanted to and died with his boots on, in the trenches of the struggle for a communist future.

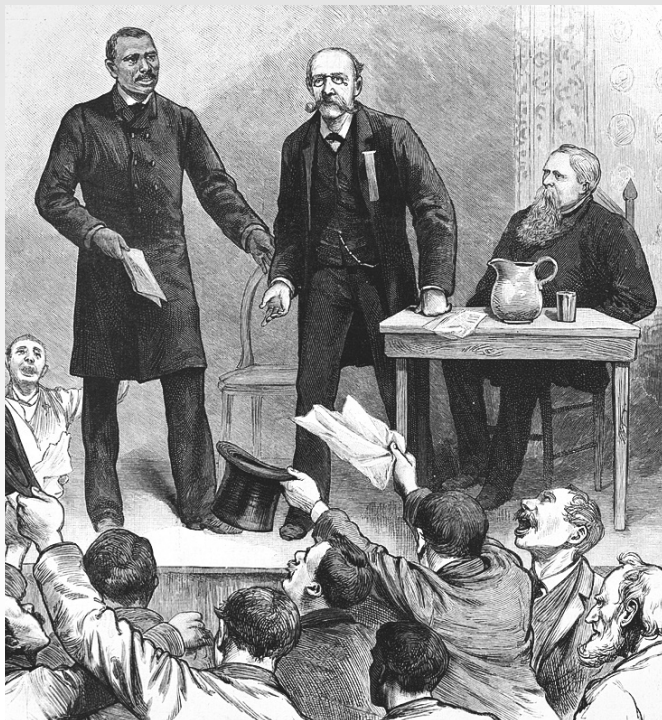
Memorial meetings for comrade Ed Cliffel are being organized in Chicago and New York. Please contact us for more information.



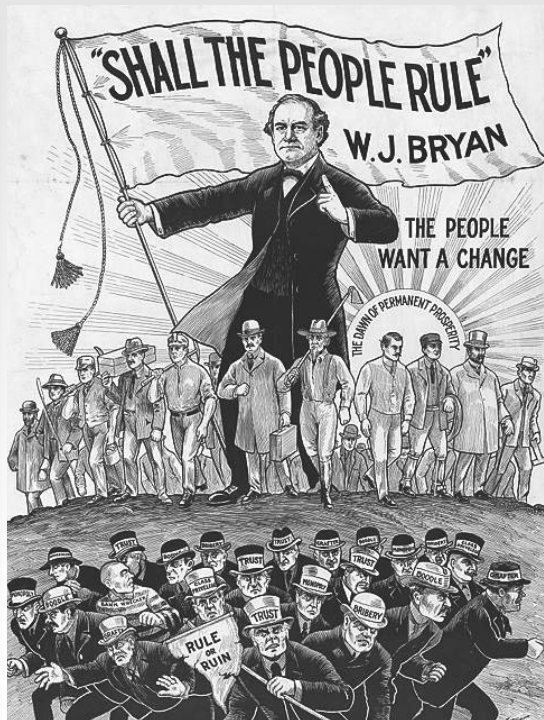
WV Photo

March 1975: Ed Cliffel (center) marches in Spartacist contingent at New York City demonstration against U.S. backing of South Vietnamese and Cambodian puppet regimes.

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution! Race, Class and American Populism



Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper



Library of Congress

Left: Knights of Labor leader Terence Powderly (center) introduced by Frank Farrell, black delegate at union's tenth annual convention, 1886. Right: Campaign poster for William Jennings Bryan, who played key role in drawing Populist movement into racist Democratic Party.

We print below the conclusion of an article based on a March 5 Spartacist League Black History forum presentation by Brian Manning in Oakland. Part One appeared in WV No. 1118 (22 September).

PART TWO

Up until the aftermath of the Civil War, trade unions in the U.S. had been very weak. In 1869, some four years after the war ended, a group that became known as the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor was founded, one of the country's earliest national labor organizations. Unlike the farmers' alliances and other populist groups, the Knights of Labor was a proletarian organization. In addition to white male workers, it organized women and black people, including in the South.

The Knights of Labor's membership pledge stated that it meant "no antagonism to capital." At the same time, its founding leader, Uriah Stephens, also called for the complete emancipation of working people "from the thralldom and loss of wage slavery" and placed great emphasis on solidarity. Their motto was "An injury to one is the concern of all," a slogan later adapted by the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) in the early 20th century.

The Knights' leadership under Terence V. Powderly, who succeeded Stephens in 1879, was opposed to strikes. But as is often the case, the rank and file thought differently. In 1885, the Knights of Labor won a strike against the Wabash Railroad, part of the southwestern system controlled by the railroad baron Jay Gould. Union members on other railways refused to operate any train with Wabash cars. The union men won a surprising and unprecedented victory, leading to a major increase in the membership rolls of the Knights. By June 1886, the national membership had increased from about 100,000 to over 700,000. Gould then provoked a strike and crushed the Knights on his railroads the next year. But the 1885 victory enhanced the union's authority.

In this period, the South experienced rapid development in cotton, tobacco, iron

and steel production, textile and furniture manufacturing, coal mining and lumbering. The workforce was mostly composed of native white Southerners, but particularly in coal mining, lumbering and iron and steel production there was a large component of black workers. The Knights originally established a foothold in urban areas but eventually spread out to more rural areas.

Knights of Labor and Black Workers

The leadership of the Knights was derived from Northern (anti-slavery) abolitionists. Powderly thought that both the abolitionists and organized labor were "revolutionary in their character...[their] ends in view were the same, viz.: The freedom of the man who worked" (quoted in Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* [1978]). The Knights of Labor leadership had several ways of deal-

ing with the race question in the South, sometimes trying to circumvent it, saying it was just an economic issue, and at other times directly confronting it. These positions were outlined by historian Philip S. Foner in his book, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker: 1619-1973*:

"Two tendencies were apparent in the attitude of the Knights of Labor toward the Negro. One was reflected in the widespread evidence of unity in strikes, labor demonstrations, picnics, assembly halls, and the election of blacks to office in predominantly white locals. Nothing like this had ever occurred before in the American labor movement. The other tendency was the reluctance of the leadership to antagonize Knights who were not prepared to grant equality to black members and its unwillingness to take steps to eliminate restrictions barring Negroes from entrance to industry and apprenticeships."

In 1886, there were 60,000 black members of the Knights, mostly in the South.

Most of them were in all-black locals, but there were a few integrated ones as well. All told, there were nearly 2,000 Knights of Labor assemblies or locals organized in the South. They were organized, as the Knights said, "irrespective of party, race, and sex." But as much as the Knights sought to recruit black and women workers, they had a reactionary position against Chinese workers, and sometimes expressed that position in violent actions.

One story captures the contradictory quality of the Knights and Powderly on anti-black racism. During the Knights' 1886 General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia, the New York delegation left a hotel when one of its black members was refused admittance. When Powderly heard of this, he had the black member, Frank J. Ferrell, introduce him on the stage of the convention. Ferrell said that the Knights sought the "abolition of those distinctions which are maintained by creed or color"



Library of Congress

People's Party 1892 presidential ticket: James B. Weaver and running mate James G. Field.

and that Powderly was a man "above the superstitions which are involved in these distinctions." After the meeting, the New York delegation went down the road and integrated a theater. At the same time, Powderly wrote a letter to the *Richmond Dispatch* in which he sought to mollify his Southern critics: "I have no wish to interfere with the social relations which exist between the races of the South.... There need be no further cause for alarm. The colored representatives to this convention will not intrude where they are not wanted, and the time-honored laws of social equality will be allowed to slumber undisturbed."

Nonetheless, many Southern blacks rushed into the Knights of Labor because they were landless and barred from many industries and sought the dignity that membership in the Knights provided. But even within their organization the Knights were not always able to overcome racial divisions. In 1887, black iron workers in Birmingham went on strike, but their white counterparts refused to support them. The state organization of the Knights ordered the white iron workers to go out on strike, which they reluctantly did. But there was so much disgruntlement that the Knights had to call off the strike.

The bosses especially targeted militant black workers for deadly violence. By 1887, the Knights had organized 10,000 cane workers in what was known as the Sugar Bowl of southern Louisiana—9,000 were black and 1,000 were white. That year sugar workers went on strike, demanding payment in cash (not scrip redeemable only at the plantation store) as well as an increase in their daily wages and payment every two weeks. The governor called in the militia—which was headed by former Confederate general P.G.T. Beauregard—to drive the workers from their cabins on the plantations. Corralled into the black part of the town of Thibodaux, as many as 300 black strikers and their families were killed by white vigilantes. This was one of the deadliest attacks on a strike in American history. There was not another attempt to organize workers in Louisiana cane country for decades.

As more radical workers entered the Knights, the conservatism of the leadership, including its opposition to class struggle, hardened. The opposition of Powderly and other Knights leaders to "radical anarchists" became especially vehement after the 1887 execution of the Haymarket martyrs—anarchists and labor organizers who fought for the eight-hour day. As radical white workers left or were expelled from the Knights, the influence of those who held racist, anti-black views became more prevalent. In 1894, shortly before its final demise, the Knights of Labor, the same organization that had earlier fought to organize black workers, called for the deportation of black people to Liberia "or some other parts of Africa."

In addition to the bosses' concerted offensive against labor struggles, white prejudice played a big part in the downfall of the Knights of Labor. At bottom, this reflected its inability to counter the rise of racist reaction in the post-Reconstruction period. Nonetheless, militant labor struggles continued through the 1890s. A number of veterans of the Knights of Labor went on to support the formation of the People's Party in 1892.

The People's Party

Blocked in their attempts in the 1880s to win gains through social struggle, populists from the farmers' alliances and other organizations turned toward the electoral system. Black and white Alliancemen joined in forming the People's Party. The case for doing so was made most strongly by black people in the South who were desperate for some kind of relief—anything to undermine the Democrats. At People's Party conventions, black members insisted on respectful treatment by white delegates, many of whom were their landlords. This alliance between the small exploiters and those they exploited reflected the irreconcilable class interests that would lead to the demise of the People's Party.

In 1892, People’s Party delegates nominated James B. Weaver as their candidate for president and ratified a platform calling for government ownership of railroads, telegraphs and steamships; a progressive income tax; an eight-hour workday; paper money; a loan program. Most significantly, the People’s Party became an electoral vehicle that threatened to break up the Democratic Party’s political monopoly in the South. Weaver, who had been a brigadier general in the Union Army during the Civil War, was the target of all kinds of abuse by the Populists’ opponents in the South.

The contradictions that would eventually tear apart this populist alliance of black and white farmers were perhaps best illustrated in the person of Tom Watson. Watson was a white large landowner whose majority-black Tenth District was the center of Populist voting strength in Georgia in the 1890s. In his essay “The Negro Question in the South” (1892), Watson expressed racist views about black people. But the essay also showed that Watson had a pragmatic rationale for enlisting the support of black voters to defeat the Democrats. It was in this context that he pointed out that both Republicans and Democrats exploited racial antagonisms to maintain their rule. Referring to poor blacks and whites, Watson wrote:

“Now the People’s Party says to these two men, ‘You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.’”

Watson ran for Congress in Georgia in 1892 and had a black Populist organizer, H.S. Doyle, who gave 63 speeches for him. When Doyle was threatened with lynching by a mob of Democrats, he fled to Watson’s house. Watson called out 2,000 armed white farmers to protect him. At the same time, Watson was no supporter of black equality; he told Doyle to sleep in the shed out back.

When the People’s Party repeatedly failed to unseat the Democrats in the South, Watson came to believe that the Democrats’ use of the bugaboo of black domination to scare whites away from the Populists could best be overcome by eliminating the black vote. In 1904, Watson offered to support Democrats seeking to amend the Georgia constitution to uphold white supremacy, in line with other Southern states that had disenfranchised black people. Watson went from defending the black vote and opposing lynching in the early 1890s to becoming a white-supremacist by the early 20th century—promoting anti-Jewish, anti-socialist, anti-Catholic and pro-KKK views in his magazine, *The Jeffersonian*.

Demonstrating the subordinate position of black people in the People’s Party, the 1892 ticket included no blacks, and only two of the 160 delegates to the Georgia state Populist convention were black, a far cry from the radical Republican regimes during Reconstruction. The white Populist leaders never stood for black social equality. Nonetheless, their appeals to

black voters, who still could tip the vote in one direction or the other in the South, led to the People’s Party being disparaged as the “Negro Party,” much as the Republican Party had been known as the “black Republicans” a generation before.

The Defeat of Populism and Consolidation of Jim Crow

In the face of burgeoning support for the Populists, the Democrats tried different strategies. Some politicians co-opted the rhetoric of the People’s Party. In other places the Democrats openly stole votes, stuffed ballot boxes and intimidated voters. And as always, the Democrats played the race card, conjuring the specter of black domination to scare white voters away from the Populists. In the 1892 election, the Democrats carried the South and won the U.S. presidency. The People’s Party got only 8.5 percent of the national vote but carried five western states and won three governorships.

However, by 1896 the Populists had fused on the national level with the Democrats and did not run a presidential candidate that year. They supported the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, who gave his famous “Cross of Gold” speech calling for an end to the gold standard, which was a key demand for the Populists. This fusion was fatal for the Populists, leading to the decline of the movement. Black Populist delegates had opposed the fusion because they recognized that it would cement white racist hostility.

The prospect of a black-white alliance undermining their rule impelled Southern Democrats in the 1890s to further extend segregation into every aspect of life. Black people were increasingly disenfranchised through the amendment of state constitutions. In 1890, Mississippi established a lengthy residency requirement, a poll tax and literacy tests to be eligible to vote. Within two years, the number of black voters dropped from 190,000 to 8,615. The Mississippi Plan of constitutional disenfranchisement, including through outright racist terror, swept across the South. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court placed its imprimatur on the racist policy of segregation with its ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, upholding the segregation of railway cars in Louisiana.

By the opening of the 20th century, black voting rights had been virtually eliminated in the South, and legally sanctioned Jim Crow segregation was fully consolidated. For the next 50 years or more, the South remained this way under one-party, Democratic rule. The Northern bourgeoisie and Republican Party had by the turn of the century thoroughly embraced the white-supremacist ideology of the “white man’s burden,” which served as justification for the subjugation of the darker races in the U.S.’s new colonies. Ben Tillman, a racist Democratic politician from South Carolina, wrote at the time of the Spanish-American War of 1898:

“No Republican leader, not even [New York] Governor [Theodore] Roosevelt, will now dare to wave the bloody shirt and preach a crusade against the South’s treatment of the negro. The North has a bloody shirt of its own. Many thousands of them have been made into shrouds for murdered Filipinos, done to death because they were fighting for liberty.”

—quoted in C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1974)

Working-Class Power Is Key

A powerful example of the working class overcoming racial divisions was the New Orleans General Strike of 1892. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), which had been formed in 1881 and largely organized skilled, white, native-born workers, was compelled to lead the general strike, uniting skilled and unskilled, black and white workers, who were largely organized in segregated locals. The strike served to break down race prejudice among white workers.

In October, the Triple Alliance of scalesmen, packers and the largely black teamsters, numbering somewhere between two and three thousand, went on strike for a ten-hour day, overtime pay and a union shop. The bosses tried to break the strike



Bettmann

Mississippi, 1963: Racist former cop assaults black civil rights activist at lunch counter sit-in against Jim Crow segregation.

by publishing stories about attacks by black strikers against local whites, but by November a general strike had begun. Forty-nine AFL unions went out, demanding union recognition, a closed shop, wage increases and shorter hours. While the unions did not attain a closed shop, they won other demands.

The general strike was a great demonstration of interracial labor solidarity in action. It showed that thousands of workers in the increasingly segregated Deep South could unite in common struggle, despite the efforts of the bosses to divide them by using anti-black prejudice. This was possible because workers have a common *class* interest in their struggles. However, economic struggles in and of themselves cannot achieve racial unity on a longer-term basis. For that it is necessary to have a class-struggle leadership that takes up the fight against black oppression and women’s oppression, and for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. Such a leadership would be based on the understanding that the workers and bosses do not share a common interest and that the capitalist system ultimately needs to be swept away through workers revolution.

A number of socialist leaders came out

of the populist movements of the late 19th century, including Socialist Party (SP) leader Eugene V. Debs. Many of the activists who went on to form the Industrial Workers of the World had also been populist activists. These leaders came to recognize the social power of the working class as key. However, the SP and, initially, the Communist Party (CP) did not see the need for a program to address the dual oppression of black people as both workers and the victims of all-sided racism. In the case of the SP, some of its leaders were openly racist. And despite being an opponent of racism, Debs remained in the SP because he believed in building a party that encompassed all political currents in the workers movement, no matter how politically backward.

It was not until the intervention of the Communist International, established after the Bolshevik Revolution led by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky in October 1917, that the early American Communists took up the struggle for black freedom. The Bolsheviks had developed their party in intense opposition to the Great Russian chauvinism of the tsar’s empire, and they understood that the struggles against national and other forms of special (i.e., non-class) oppression could be powerful levers to advance socialist revolution. They had built a vanguard party of workers of different nationalities with the most advanced, revolutionary consciousness.

The idea of the fight against special oppression as an impetus for revolution changed how American Communists thought about their work in a country founded on black chattel slavery. This was captured by James P. Cannon, a CP leader who was later won to Trotskyism, i.e., authentic revolutionary Marxism. Cannon noted that American Communists learned “to assimilate the new theory of the Negro question as a special question of doubly-exploited second-class citizens, requiring a program of special demands as part of the overall program—and to start doing something about it” (“The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement,” in *The First Ten Years of American Communism* [1962]).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a wave of popular discontent over economic devastation spawned a number of populist demagogues who tried to deflect this anger away from the capitalist

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Workers Must Fight for National Liberation

The working class has enormous potential social power that must be marshalled in support of the struggle for independence. It is absolutely necessary to defend Catalonia's bourgeois pro-independence leaders against the repression from Madrid. However, workers must be politically



Barcelona, October 3: Hundreds of thousands take to streets in Catalonia-wide “national stoppage” protesting police violence against independence vote.

—*The History of the Russian Revolution* (1932)

The Catalan bourgeois nationalists have long looked to the European Union (EU) for their salvation. Following the referendum, Catalan government leader Carles Puigdemont declared: "I must appeal directly to Europe.... The European Union



The EU is determined to keep the current European borders intact, fearful that the breakup of Spain or any other member state could bring down the whole EU house of cards. As Marxists, we are



September 20: Over a thousand people demonstrate in Perpinyà, France, part of Northern Catalonia, before the October 1 referendum. Banner reads: "Northern Catalonia is also Catalonia."

Sundry reformists in Spain have for years opposed independence for Catalonia, while pretending to fight for self-determination. The Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (CRT), affiliated to the neo-Morenoite

The breakup of the Castilian-chauvinist Spanish state, with its monarchy and

Francoist nostalgists, would represent an enormous step forward for the struggles of all working people in Spain against the capitalist rulers. The struggle for national liberation of Catalonia and the Basque Country is integrally linked to the fight to overthrow capitalist rule throughout Spain and France. What is needed to lead the workers and oppressed in this fight are Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard parties, national sections of a reformed Fourth International. *Down with the Spanish monarchy! For workers republics!* ■

[illegible]

Independence Now!



Reuters

Catalan Masses Defy Spanish State

OCTOBER 3—Two days ago, the Spanish state unleashed massive repression aimed at preventing an independence referendum in Catalonia. Over two million people defied the savage police mobilization to cast their ballots, and 90 percent voted in favor of an independent republic in Catalonia.

The Castilian rulers of the capitalist Spanish state will brook no opposition to the sacrosanct unity of the Spanish prison house of peoples, which denies the right of self-determination to the Catalan, Basque and Galician nations. The state of siege imposed by Madrid is a powerful confirmation that the national oppression of Catalans—and of the Basques—cannot end short of independence. Autonomy is a fraud—Madrid retains the whip hand. The only principled position for revolutionary Marxists is to demand the immediate independence of these nations and to rally the workers of Spain and Europe to this struggle.

In the lead-up to the vote, the Castilian chauvinists who rule the country from Madrid declared the referendum illegal, with the full backing of the European Union. Thousands of Policía Nacional (National Police) and paramilitary Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) cops were sent to suppress any move toward self-determination by the oppressed Catalan people. The Catalan government's funds were seized, many of its leaders arrested and offices raided. Millions of ballots, posters and official ballot boxes were confiscated. Tens of thousands of protesters who took to the streets are threatened with sedition charges. Hundreds of websites promoting the referendum were taken down by the Spanish authorities, including those of the Catalan government. Anyone deemed responsible for conducting the referendum is facing jail time and massive fines.

Thousands occupied schools overnight and massed before dawn to ensure the referendum went ahead. As the polls opened, riot cops smashed their way into polling stations, beating voters, dragging them out into the street and seizing ballot

**Policía Nacional, Guardia Civil
Out of Catalonia!
For a Catalan Workers Republic!**

Province of Girona, Catalonia: People confront Spanish Guardia Civil cops trying to prevent independence referendum, October 1.

boxes. People outside were hit with rubber bullets, tear gas and police clubs. Nearly 900 people were injured.

Despite the police terror tactics, the Catalan people remain unbowed. As we go to press, a “national stoppage” called by the Catalan government, business asso-

ciations and unions to protest the repression has brought Catalonia to a halt. It is urgent for the working class in Catalonia and throughout Spain to rally in defense of Catalan national rights. Working people throughout Spain must demand: **Drop all charges against independentistes!**



AP

Barcelona, September 28: Firefighters union joins student demonstrators. On October 1, firefighters defended polling stations.

Guardia Civil and Policía Nacional out of Catalonia!

The brutality unleashed by the Spanish government against the people of Catalonia is reminiscent of the long years of the Franco dictatorship. The Catalans and the republican Basques played a vanguard role in the Spanish Revolution of the 1930s. But the triumph of counterrevolution in 1939 under Generalissimo Francisco Franco resulted in decades of bloody repression of the working class and of the Catalan and Basque nations. Thus, after Franco died in 1975, the struggles of the oppressed nations were mainly expressed along national lines, in contrast to the 1930s, when the working classes of these same nations fought directly for power.

Spain's right-wing governing Partido Popular (Popular Party) is descended from the Franco regime.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy declares that the Catalan independence referendum violated the 1978 Spanish constitution. Maintaining the unity of the Spanish state is central to the chauvinist, anti-democratic constitution of 1978, which established the monarchy as bonapartist overlord. The social-democratic Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) and Stalinist Partido Comunista de España (PCE, now buried in Izquierda Unida) criminally supported the establishment of this reactionary constitution while mouthing platitudes about “self-determination.” To maintain the “indivisibility” of Spain, bloody police-state repression has long been used against militant fighters for Basque independence, including by PSOE governments.

Tens of thousands have rallied in Euzkai Herria (Basque Country) in support of the Catalan referendum, and the Basque independence movement has been given a boost by the developments in Catalonia. The Basque and Catalan nations, each of which straddles the border between France and Spain, are oppressed by both these capitalist states. Solidarity protests have also taken place in the Catalan and Basque regions of France.

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