

Turkey Attacks Kurdish YPG: NATO Partner vs. U.S. Tool



Left: Turkish tanks push into Kurdish-controlled Afrin in northern Syria, January 22. Right: YPG member with U.S. military officer in Syria, April 2017. Kurdish nationalists' alliance with U.S. imperialism betrays Kurdish masses' national aspirations.

U.S. Out of Syria!

On January 20, Turkey launched a cross-border military assault on the Kurdish-controlled canton of Afrin in northwestern Syria. As tanks, artillery and U.S.-supplied warplanes bombarded their homes, thousands of desperate civilians found themselves trapped, unable to cross the border into Turkey and blocked by Syrian government checkpoints from fleeing south to the city of Aleppo. Ankara's stated aim is to create a 30-kilometer buffer zone by driving back the Kurdish nationalists of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military arm, the People's Protection Committees (YPG), which Turkey calls a "terror army." In Turkey itself, the bonapartist regime of Recep Tayyip Erdogan continues its war against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the PYD's mother organization.

The YPG has served as ground forces for the U.S. military intervention and bombing campaign in Syria directed mainly against the Islamic State (ISIS), for example, by calling in the coordinates for U.S.-led airstrikes that helped drive ISIS out of Raqqa in October. Yet Washington gave a green light to its NATO ally Turkey to attack Afrin. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson cynically cautioned Ankara to "show some restraint," while emphasizing that U.S. forces do not work directly with the YPG in that slice of northwest Syria.

Moscow also approved of Turkey's offensive, withdrawing its military personnel from Afrin and allowing Turkish strikes in airspace that Russia controls. While Turkey and Russia have divergent interests in Syria, with the latter backing the Bashar al-Assad regime, they agree with the U.S. on maintaining Syria's "territorial integrity"—i.e., no independent Kurdish state.

Moscow no doubt relishes the fraying of relations between the U.S. and Turkey as America's NATO ally engages in a



Destruction in Raqqa following airstrike by U.S.-led forces, October 12.

military confrontation with Washington's Kurdish proxies. Turkey attacked Afrin just days after Washington had announced plans for a 30,000-strong "border protection force" in an area of northeastern Syria controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (essentially the YPG with some Arab forces added in). Erdogan has announced that after Afrin, he intends to turn his fire on the city of Manbij, the gateway to that area, where there are a few thousand American troops.

Behind Erdogan's bluster is his attempt to pressure the U.S. to drop its Syrian Kurdish proxies, one of the main sources of the growing tensions between Ankara and Washington. For its part, the U.S. is putting out mixed signals about its intentions. After Erdogan hit the roof over the border proposal, Trump administration officials immediately began to backtrack. Nonetheless, the Pentagon continued to back the plan, with the *New York Times* (23 January) declaring that "the Syrian Kurds will most likely serve as the backbone of the allied forces on the ground in Syria for months to come."

The backdrop to the U.S. military deployment in Syria is the civil war which, beginning in 2011, has pitted Islamist and other opposition forces against the Assad dictatorship. Most of the rebel groups have been armed by the U.S., including Turkey's favorite, the Free Syrian Army, which is currently fighting the YPG. As Marxists, we have no side in the reactionary and communalist civil war, including in clashes between Washington's Turkish (nominal) ally and its Kurdish tools.

Where we do have a side is against the U.S. and other imperialist powers. Last month, the White House confirmed that the U.S. intends to maintain its military presence in Syria indefinitely. The U.S. has already established ten bases in northeastern Syria and is developing another in southern Syria near the borders with Iraq and Jordan. The latter would serve as a barrier to overland support by Iran for Assad and for Hezbollah in Lebanon and as a point of pressure on the Iraqi government, which is serving both the U.S. and Iran.

Workers in the U.S. must demand: All U.S. troops and bases out of Syria and the

Near East now! While our main opposition is to U.S. imperialism—the greatest force for organized terror on the planet—we call for the regional powers Turkey, Russia and Iran to get out as well.

Opposition to Imperialism: Crucial to Kurdish Liberation

The national liberation of the Kurds, who are divided among and oppressed by Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, is a historically just cause. We call for a united, independent Kurdistan encompassing all the Kurds, and would also support Kurdish independence from individual capitalist states. The struggle for Kurdish self-determination is a crucial part of our perspective to mobilize the proletariat in the region in the revolutionary fight for a socialist federation of the Near East that would include a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan. The necessary prerequisite to any such struggle is uncompromising opposition to imperialism.

Just as the Kurdish nationalist forces have done for many years in Iraq, the PYD/YPG leadership in Syria has betrayed the Kurdish masses by subordinating their desire for national liberation to the YPG's role as foot soldiers for the U.S. And now YPG spokesmen fear that the U.S. will abandon the Kurds to attacks by Turkey. Indeed, once the imperialists decide they no longer need their Kurdish nationalist stooges, they will discard them, as they have repeatedly done before.

The U.S. imperialists are committed enemies of Kurdish self-determination. The situation in Iraqi Kurdistan is a case in point. After siding with the U.S. in its 1991 war against Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) consolidated autonomous rule in northern Iraq as U.S. warplanes enforced a "no fly zone" overhead. In the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation, KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan forces served as ground troops for Washington, helping to crush resistance to the imperialist occupation. Kurdish forces then joined with the other U.S. proxies—the Iraqi army and Shia

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Their Monuments and Ours

4 January 2018

Dear WV,

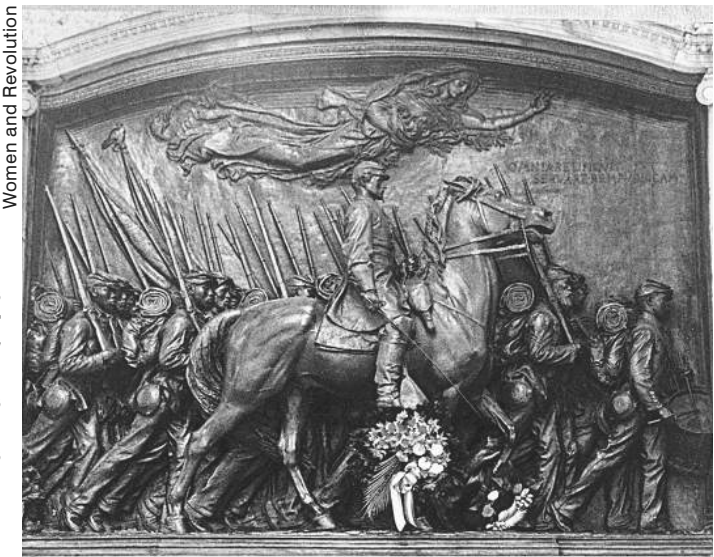
In response to the article “Confederate Monuments: Tear ‘Em All Down!” (WV 1113) I think it appropriate to note an example of the working class tearing down a monument representing interests antithetical to the workers’ own. The example I had in mind was the destruction of Napoleon’s Victory Column, decreed by the Paris Commune in 1871, while under the guns of both Prussian and Bonapartist armies, as a symbol of national chauvinism and an incitement to national hatred...attitudes unworthy of the Commune in relation to workers of all other countries. [All ellipses by author.]

The Paris Commune, with its establishment of the first Workers’ Republic, had a profound effect on the American bourgeoisie.

This event, among others, led many of America’s Northern bourgeoisie to rethink the wisdom of experiments in remaking southern society and using the Federal army to defend Reconstruction governments and black rights to achieve that end.

Making peace with their Southern bourgeois partners suddenly made a lot more sense, after the Commune, even if it meant abandoning the black population to race-caste status, enforced by system-

Monument in Boston Common memorializes Union officer Robert Gould Shaw and the heroic black troops he led in 54th Massachusetts during Civil War.



atic violence perpetrated by the forbears of today’s Fascists.

Make no mistake about what the Fascists’ “celebration” of those who fought to keep black people in chains means today.

Auschwitz and Dachau, Belsen and Birkenau, celebrated not in stone but, once again, in reality, is the ultimate monument the Fascists hope to enforce on humanity.

A victorious workers’ state would celebrate its own victory, by contrast, with

monuments appropriate to its aim of liberating humanity from the scourge of capitalism and its Fascist dogs of war, by honoring all those who won a crucial initial victory in the still ongoing battle to Finish The Civil War....

One hundred and fifty years ago today’s Fascist forbears were beaten by a black and white army, significantly made up of southerners, ex-slaves, free blacks and the foreign born, receiving critical political

support from workers in other countries.

Seventy-five years ago another generation of Fascists were crushed by the might of the Red Army, defending the Soviet degenerated workers’ state.

Today’s Fascists will be defeated by the mobilization of all their intended victims behind the power of the working class, strategically placed in capitalist class society, and the only class with the social power, organization and interest to smash the Fascist threat, here and internationally, as part of its fight to take power in its own name and create an International Soviet.

This program is expressed in the ICL’s call for labor black united front mobilizations to smash the Fascists and its power expressed in a series of successful anti-Fascist mobilizations in the US and one in Rouen, France.

We fully honor the sacrifice of all those who fought against or were victims of Fascist terror only by mobilizing the power to stop the Fascist scum in their tracks, so we do not have to keep adding names like Heather Heyer to the list of the lost and we can, instead, stuff the physical and ideological expression of Fascism down deep in the trash bin of history where it belongs, and where it will stay, with the victory of Socialism internationally over decaying capitalism and the filth it degrades human life with.

Fraternally,
Gordon W.



TROTSKY

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

In a lecture given at the onset of the civil rights movement, veteran Trotskyist Richard Fraser explained the singular role of racial oppression in preserving the rule of a tiny handful of capitalists in the U.S. Notwithstanding the end of Jim Crow segregation in the South, black oppression remains the bedrock of American capitalism. The liberation of the multiracial working class from the bondage of wage slavery will never happen without the proletariat taking up the cause of black freedom, which itself requires the shattering of this racist capitalist system through socialist revolution.

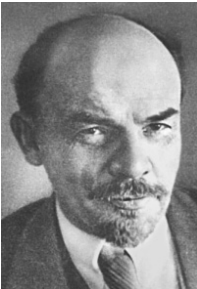
There is nothing in the mode of production itself which divides society into races. This division is the result of the disfiguration of the capitalist mode of production in the South by the influences of chattel slavery. It is maintained only by force and violence and is accompanied by prejudice, special exploitation, extreme ignorance and cultural barrenness. Race consciousness reflects in one way or another the distortion of the mode of production and the violence and prejudice of the race system.

In the southern system and the race relations which derive from it, all Negroes are the victims of discrimination. But except for a minority of capitalists and privileged middle class people, the white population as such does not derive benefit from it. On the contrary, the white worker and farmer are as much the objects of class exploitation as are the Negroes. A majority of the workers and farmers in the South are white. But their standard of living and general social condition is directly determined by that of the Negroes.

Therefore, while the dark race is the direct victim of discrimination, the group which gains from it is not the lighter skinned race but a class: the ruling capitalist class of the United States. To be sure, this class is lily white, but it is not their color which distinguishes them from the rest of society, rather their great wealth, and the control which they exert over all finance and industry....

Race prejudice, which is the form of white race consciousness, is one of the means by which the extreme exploitation of white workers themselves is maintained. It is in direct opposition to their material interests.

—Richard S. Fraser, “The Negro Struggle and the Proletarian Revolution” (1953), printed in “In Memoriam—Richard S. Fraser,” *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, August 1990



LENIN

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Spartacist



Black History Month Forums

John Brown Revolutionary Abolitionist Fighter for Black Freedom

Finish the Civil War!

For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

LOS ANGELES

Saturday, February 24
4 p.m.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church,* 3300 Wilshire Blvd.
(At Berendo St., 2 blocks west of Wilshire/Vermont stop on Red/Purple Line. Entrance on Berendo.)

For info: (213) 380-8239 • slsycla@sbcglobal.net

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

NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, February 24
3 p.m.

322 West 48th Street, First Floor, Manhattan
(Between 8th and 9th Avenues—
Take A, C or E to 42nd Street)

For info: (212) 267-1025 • nysl@tiac.net

Spartacist League / Spartacus Youth Club Day School

BAY AREA

Saturday, March 3
12:30 p.m.

Rockridge Library, 2nd Floor
5366 College Ave., Oakland
(5 blocks from Rockridge BART, near Broadway)
For info: (510) 839-0851 • slbayarea@fastmail.net

John Brown
Revolutionary Abolitionist Fighter for Black Freedom
12:30 p.m.

Communism and the Family
The Russian Revolution and
the Emancipation of Women
2:30 p.m.

WORKERS VANGUARD



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9 February 2018

Warning from Toronto Transport Worker

New NYC Transit Boss: Union Buster

We print below a contribution, edited for publication, by Debby S., a retired transit worker in Toronto, where Andy Byford ran the transit system before becoming head of the New York City Transit Authority last month.

On hearing that Andy Byford was made head of NY transit, I thought it would be useful for readers to know about his union-wrecking operation in Toronto. First, some history to set the stage. It was the New Democratic Party (NDP) mayor David Miller who laid the basis for the era of Rob Ford, the racist, wife-beating, anti-union mayor of Toronto from 2010-14. The NDP is a bourgeois workers party, with organic links to labour but a pro-capitalist leadership and program.

Under Miller's reign, transit workers held a wildcat strike in 2006. It was initiated by 800 mechanical and janitorial workers who were protesting proposed changes in work schedules, including permanent reassignment of 100 workers to night shifts (regardless of seniority). At a union meeting, track workers told then-union president Bob Kinnear to do something about these attacks or they would. Kinnear and the union tops did nothing, so the workers did something. The wildcat lasted only one day, but that was enough for Miller to join the anti-union hysteria

a station foreman and worked his way up the management ladder, eventually becoming General Manager of the Central, Bakerloo and Victoria lines, three of London's busiest subway lines. After a stint in Australia working for Sydney's commuter railway he was hired by TTC as the chief operations officer. He quickly became the chief executive officer when he showed his ability to be a lapdog for Ford, going along with the decision for a new addition to the Scarborough subway line (known as the line to nowhere).

Byford is a media hog and darling. The bourgeois press raves about his "great" record and presents him as squeaky clean. "Under his leadership, subway delays have been reduced, customer satisfaction has hit record levels, and a number of major projects *progressed* (my emphasis), including the phased introduction of a [communications-based train control] system and the imminent completion of a major subway line extension" (www.railwayage.com). Tell this to the workers who use public transit and are late to work and face lack of service regularly.

The real story behind Byford is the usual: speedup, speedup, and more speedup. The horrible conditions under his reign have led to more workers retiring before their time. In 2013, Byford instituted a snitch



Lum/Globe and Mail

Incoming NYC transit head Andy Byford (left) with racist Toronto mayor Rob Ford, 2014. Byford served as Ford's axman in attacks on transit workers.

harassment and firing of workers. Byford also created a contracted-out, low-paying (minimum wage) job called "customer service ambassador." These workers get paid almost nothing to "alert" the pissed-off public of route changes, delays and breakdowns due to the underfunded, mis-managed system. Sometimes being an "ambassador" means you stand outside in minus 15-degree Celsius [5 degrees Fahrenheit] weather for 12 hours a day with scant breaks.

The city tops, with Byford's approval and oversight, contracted out the bus cleaners and the janitors of public washrooms. These used to be union jobs with benefits and pension. Wages went from \$25 an hour to \$14 with no pension and little benefits. The concern for "containing costs" of course comes with a price on workers' safety. On 19 August 2013, a contract worker died and a second suffered broken bones at the Malvern bus barn when a garage door opened and tipped over their scissor lift, an elevated work platform. The two contract employees received on-the-spot, limited training that same morning before their shift. It was their first day on the job. More recently, on 16 August 2017, a unionized worker with 30 years on the job was struck by a bus operated by a contract worker, who did not even have a driver's license, going over the speed limit at a bus garage.

The bosses' aim in using non-union contract workers is to pit different sectors of the workforce against one another and to crush the more than 10,000-strong ATU as well as the two smaller craft unions that are part of TTC. There needs to be a fight to organize the unorganized and for union wages for all those work-

ing at Toronto transit. There is a history of workers fighting the divide-and-rule attacks of the bosses. Between 1989 and 1991, there was a series of work slowdowns, culminating in a four-day strike, that put a stop to management's attempts at making drivers a part-time workforce.

Byford's speedups have hit night crews especially hard, as they are frequently under pressure to get the job done no matter what before service restarts. In September 2012, Peter Pavlovski, a low-level foreman (one of the few well respected by workers), died on the job. In October 2017, Tom Dedes, a union member with 18 years' experience, was also killed. Both were pinned by workcars (modified rail cars used for track and tunnel work). Both were working overtime and at the end of their shifts. The deaths and injuries are why elected union safety committees that are independent of management should be formed.

In October 2016, the transit agency filed an application with the Ontario Labour Relations Board alleging that ATU Local 113 condoned an illegal strike after only nine (!) of roughly 600 train operators signed up for a voluntary overnight shift during the Nuit Blanche art festival. Bob Kinnear, the sellout union president at the time, said the lack of volunteers was a "grassroots movement" that wasn't condoned by union leaders. The Nuit Blanche incident occurred shortly before Byford's TTC introduced one-person train operation on the Sheppard line (smallest line), a move the union opposed.

The TTC's "Fit for Duty" campaign has made working conditions even worse. Workers are hunted down and disciplined for taking a nap even when on lunch break. Random drug testing gained currency in Toronto after a fatal August 2011 bus crash in which the bus driver was charged with possession of marijuana but *was not found to be impaired*. Byford rammed through drug testing and the TTC approved the implementation of random drug and alcohol testing for designated (what they call safety critical) employees beginning in March 2017. Many workers now question the "randomness" of these tests, as they have witnessed the most militant workers and those who are deemed "troublemakers" being tested and sometimes more than once! We remember Tony Almeida, a workcar operator killed on the job in 2007 due to unsafe conditions and smeared by TTC management and in the press as a pot smoker!

Class-conscious workers in Toronto had no illusions in Byford as a "friend of workers" and weren't fooled by his "we're all family" rhetoric as he was laying waste to union jobs and union working conditions. Likewise, workers in NYC transit must beware of this vicious anti-union boss. ■



John Hanley; @bradTTC (inset)

Toronto transit worker Tom Dedes (inset) taken to hospital after being fatally injured on the job, October 2017. Bosses' speedups endanger all workers.

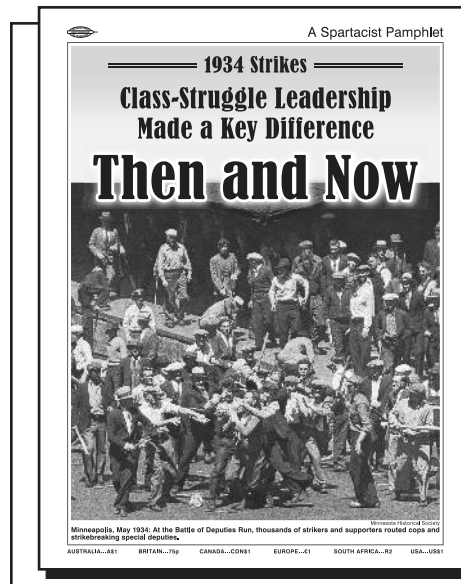
that ensued and demand massive fines from the union.

In 2008, transit workers struck again over a lousy contract that impacted maintenance workers. The strike was backed by subway operators, streetcar and bus drivers (who are all in the same local) despite the bosses and union tops seeking to divide workers to ram through the contract. The city demanded the province of Ontario enact strikebreaking legislation, for which the provincial NDP caucus voted unanimously. In 2009, Miller targeted the Canadian Union of Public Employees in Toronto, aiming to destroy sick benefits and gut seniority rights. A bitter 39-day strike beat back most of the attacks, but the union leadership caved in on the city's demand for second-tier wage and benefits for new-hires. It was after these labour struggles that Rob Ford was elected on an anti-union mandate. In 2011, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) was designated an "essential service," taking away Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 113's right to strike. The union is still challenging this...in court.

Byford was hired in November of that year. While he comes from British working-class stock—his grandfather was a London Transport bus driver for 40 years—Byford was always on the wrong side of the class line. He started out as

line to encourage workers and staff to anonymously report "unethical or illegal" behaviour. More backward workers were ratting out their fellow workers due to competition for jobs. He also implemented new job qualifications intended to weed out those from working-class backgrounds without university education. One story is that a black, female shop facility janitor with 25 years seniority would have been forced to resign or be fired because she didn't have a driver's license, which was not required when she was hired. The only reason she kept her job is because a co-worker offered her his job in the shop cafeteria, which didn't require a license, while he bid on a different job.

Byford pushed to reinstate special constables at TTC who have the authority of a police officer on or in relation to TTC property, including buses and streetcars. They don't carry guns, but are armed with batons and tear gas. By mid 2015, 40 former fare-enforcement inspectors were trained. They join the Toronto police Transit Patrol Unit, which also oversees the TTC. Ostensibly, this was to protect bus drivers and streetcar or subway operators, who are assaulted about four times a week in Toronto. In fact, these cops are used to police transit workers as well as the public and intervene in "workplace violence" matters that have led to the



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Anti-Muslim “Prevent” Program: Danger to Everyone’s Rights

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer No. 240 (Winter 2017-2018), published by our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain.

WORKERS HAMMER

Police interrogate two Syrian refugees about their attitude towards Bashar al-Assad and how often they pray: staff at their son’s nursery had reported them because the traumatised child was constantly drawing pictures of planes dropping bombs. A Sikh student overheard reciting a Punjabi prayer in her room later finds that the room has been searched. These are just a couple of examples of the workings of the government’s sinister “Prevent” programme.

Writing on Prevent in the *London Review of Books* (18 May 2017), Karma Nabulsi describes how: “If you are identified as ‘vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism’, you are reported—or ‘referred’—to the police. Referrals can come from teachers, council workers, social workers, doctors, university lecturers, nurses, librarians or opticians.” In 2015-16, over 7,600 people—including *350 children under the age of ten*—were reported under Prevent on suspicion that they were—or could become—“extremists.” Muslims made up fully 65 percent of these so-called referrals, *13 times* their proportion of the population.

The 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act mandates public employees to report “early warning signs” of terrorist sympathies in individuals they encounter. More than half a million people have been forced to sit through Prevent training on how to pry into the private lives and political thoughts of their students, patients, etc. The consequences include things like the front-page headline of a recent *London Evening Standard* article (9 November 2017) on Prevent, which blared: “Boy, nine, hails I.S. in London school.” Another potential “terrorist” exposed!

Prevent is explicitly designed to target “nonviolent extremism”—in other words, thought crimes—in what is chillingly referred to as “pre-criminal space,” where no law has been breached but individuals are nonetheless investigated by police. “Extremism,” elastically defined as beliefs that conflict with “British values,” can include anything from speaking a foreign language to defending the oppressed Palestinians against Zionist terror.

Arun Kundnani, author of *The Muslims Are Coming!: Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (2014), explains how Prevent’s Channel scheme for “individual intervention” works:

“Police officers build a file, including interviews with the family, teachers and social workers. What happens to that data and who has access to it? There is a lack of transparency. Channel referrals are stored in a database held by the police counter-terrorism units. Officers in that unit—



London: Army deployed on streets to bolster “war on terror” following May 2017 Manchester bombing.

and MI5 officers embedded in terrorism units—would all have access to that data.” — guardian.co.uk, 23 September 2015

While currently directed overwhelmingly against the Muslim population, such policies seek to chill political dissent and regiment the population as a whole; they are ultimately directed against the left and the multiethnic working class.

A case in point is the experience of Jameel Scott. A 17-year-old supporter of the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Scott was arrested for participating in an April 2010 protest at Manchester University against the Israeli ambassador. Although the criminal charges against Scott were dropped, the North West Counter-Terrorism Unit placed him in Channel. For two years, he was banned from going to demonstrations, was spied on by cops and pressured to reveal information about friends in the SWP and anti-racist groups.

Down With the Racist “War on Terror”!

Intensified state repression is the domestic expression of the global “war on terror” under which the imperialists ride roughshod over neocolonial peoples around the world. Prevent was first developed by the [Tony] Blair Labour government in 2003 as part of its Contest counter-terrorism strategy. Not coincidentally, this escalation of the domestic “war on terror” occurred shortly after the U.S. and British imperialists invaded Iraq. The Special Branch, formerly devoted to ferreting out Irish Republicans and “reds under the bed,” was refashioned as a counter-terrorism unit. Over the years, Prevent/Contest has been expanded repeatedly. Between 2003 and 2008, the number of cops deployed on counter-terrorism climbed from 1,700 to nearly 3,000, while MI5 almost doubled in size.

Britain

The man Blair chose to run the Prevent Violent Extremism programme in 2007 was Charles Farr, head of the counter-terrorism department at MI6 and a former covert operative in Afghanistan and Jordan. Addressing a parliamentary committee in 2009, Farr made clear that his target was not those “committed to violent extremism” but “a much larger group of people who feel a degree of negativity, if not hostility, towards the state, the country, the community, and who are, as it were, the pool in which terrorists will swim.” Such comments, along with Prevent’s rhetoric about “winning hearts and minds,” come straight out of the imperialists’ counter-insurgency doctrines which they brutally applied against anti-colonial struggles from Malaya to Kenya.

Indeed, Britain’s current “war on terror” has a long and sordid lineage both overseas and domestically. In Malaya, beginning in 1950 under Clement Attlee’s Labour government, more than half a million Chinese peasants were imprisoned in barbed-wire-enclosed “new villages.” During the Cold War against the Soviet Union, the secretive Information Research Department groomed “left-wing” anti-Communist informants such as George Orwell. During the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland, the oppressed Catholic population as a whole was subject to blanket surveillance and repression, while the Irish in Britain were treated as potential terrorists.

The state’s repressive anti-Muslim campaign has been aided by campus administrations and student unions. After a former student at University College London (UCL) was arrested for trying to blow up an airliner over Detroit on Christmas Day 2009, the UCL student union readily handed over the names and personal details of some *900* members or former members of the campus Islamic Society and other Muslim groups at UCL—after the Islamic Society itself refused to do so (independent.co.uk, 1 April 2010). The cops then passed on the list to the CIA.

Young Muslims are a convenient testing group for ramping up state surveillance against wider sections of the population. This country’s bigoted rulers treat British Muslims with the same contempt they heaped on their colonial slaves. Muslims are disproportionately represented among the unemployed and those in prison. They are discriminated against in housing and social services and are subject to brutal physical attack from fascists and the police. Helping to fuel the bigotry that underpins these conditions are manufactured scandals such as the “Trojan Horse” witchhunt in Birmingham in 2014, when hysteria was whipped up over a supposed Islamic plot to take over city schools.

Anti-Muslim bigotry, in addition to providing a cover for increased policing of the population as a whole, also aids the bosses in setting workers of different religions and national origins against each other. It is a matter of their own self-defence for the unions to oppose the “war on terror” and take up the defence of the oppressed Muslim minority. Many teachers chafe at being forced to spy on their students; the National Union of Teachers passed a motion at their 2016 conference calling to withdraw the Prevent programme from schools. But that resolution is a dead letter unless the union movement insists that its members will not participate in Prevent.

The desperate conditions of life in Britain for Muslims and other minorities, as well as the imperialist terror-bombing of predominantly Muslim countries, generate rage and despair, which, especially given the lack of class struggle, can fuel the growth of religious reaction and lead to acts of indiscriminate criminal terror like last May’s Manchester Arena bombing. In fact, perpetrators of such atrocities display the same mentality as the imperialists: identifying the whole population with the policies of the ruling-class oppressors. To end the brutality and degradation bred by social oppression requires putting an end to the imperialist system that perpetuates that oppression. It will take nothing short of proletarian socialist revolution to do that.

Reformism and the State

The Labour Party manifesto in last June’s election called for a review of Prevent’s “effectiveness and its potential to alienate minority communities.” Jeremy Corbyn has criticised Prevent because it “is seen to target the Muslim community, not anybody else,” pleading that it also deal with “far-right extremism” and racism (*Independent*, 26 March 2017). In fact, “far-right extremism” was added to Prevent’s menu in 2011 in response to similar complaints, without in any way changing its fundamental character.

The bourgeois state consists of special bodies of armed men who defend the rule and profits of the capitalists against those they exploit and oppress, in particular against the working class, the only force with the potential to overthrow capitalist class rule. During their heroic year-long strike in 1984-85, members of the National Union of Mineworkers saw the Thatcher government deploy against *them* the dirty tricks and police-state measures the British state had long used to suppress the Catholic population in Northern Ireland. We Marx-

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Black Oppression...

(continued from page 8)

To use Trump’s word, the “shithole” is capitalist America. It has always been so for those at the bottom. About 5.3 million Americans live on less than four dollars a day. Some 30 million have no health insurance. Women in the U.S. are more likely to die from childbirth- or pregnancy-related causes than anywhere else in the industrialized world—black women at three times the rate of white women. The U.S. locks up more people than any other country. And we know who they lock up: courageous fighters like Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier and other class-war prisoners. Nearly 3,000 people are on death row. One in every nine people in prison is serving a life sentence, nearly half of them black. Meanwhile, the local cops are attacking protesters and killing people as much as they were last year and the year before and the year before that. The Feds are smearing black activists and radicals as “domestic terrorists,” setting them up for repression.

The capitalist class at the top, a tiny fraction of the “1 percent,” keeps making a killing while the laborers who sweat and toil get their wages slashed. And those whose countries have been wrecked by U.S. imperialism—they make a harrowing escape, come here to work for small change and live in fear of deportation. Anyone who has made it to this country should get all the rights of anyone already here. Our demand is for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

Trump inherited a well-oiled deportation machine from the plantation’s first black overseer. Under Obama, we saw the expansion of nightmare detention centers, a “fast track” system for arrests and millions of deportations. Trump is explicit about his aims and has a loud mouth; Obama was the smart sugarcoater, the quiet enemy.

To get a measure of Washington’s contempt for those it dominates, look at Puerto Rico. Four months after Hurricane Maria, 40 percent of the island still has no electricity. On top of that: massive debt, taken out of the hides of working people;

ists oppose any expansion of the bourgeois state’s apparatus of repression—even laws against the fascists will ultimately be used against the workers movement.

Corbyn, in line with the outlook of Labourite reformism, sees in the “democratic” capitalist state not an enemy of workers and minorities but a vehicle for social progress. Thus the Labour manifesto called for greater military spending and more cops, prison guards and border police. Likewise, Corbyn seized on the criminal Manchester bombing to attack the Tories for cutting back on the number of cops on the street. This criticism of the Tories from the right is an expression of Labour’s fundamental allegiance to the British capitalist order, whose “democratic” trappings are a cover for the class dictatorship of the exploiters. (Those democratic trappings were certainly never on display in Britain’s colonial possessions, which were ruled by naked state terror.)

Writing in 1935, Labourite academic and writer Harold Laski noted in his treatise *The State in Theory and Practice*:

“how accidental was the union of capitalism with democracy. It was the outcome, not of an essential harmony of inner principle, but of that epoch in economic evolution.... It would offer social reforms so long as these did not jeopardize the essential relations of the capitalist system.”

The only rights sacred to the bourgeoisie are its rights to rule and to reap profits.

Having gutted industry, increased the exploitation of the working class and slashed social programmes benefitting poor and working people over the last several decades, Britain’s rulers are quite cognisant that they are sitting on top of seething discontent. In fact, it is this discontent that propelled Corbyn’s rise. But Labour, a bourgeois workers party with



Spartacist League/Partisan Defense Committee contingent at anti-fascist protest in Berkeley, August 27.

government services slashed; hobbled medical care and transportation; foreclosures. How does one breathe under this weight of a colonial master who loots you, lets you rot, then stomps on your tattered remains? Puerto Ricans are an important part of the working class and union movement here in the U.S. American workers should side with their Puerto Rican class brothers and sisters—they have a common class enemy. Cancel Puerto Rico’s debt! For the right of independence!

Imagine telling workers of countries plundered by imperialism like Puerto Rico that national sovereignty doesn’t matter, or that they have to suck it up and remain at the mercy of the overlords’ banks. That’s what it means to tell Greek workers that they should stay in the European Union (EU), an imperialist cartel where the European powers, especially Germany, dominate the weaker states. We are for breaking up this capitalist trade bloc. This is why we not only call for Greece to get out of the EU, but also welcomed the Brexit vote. The vote for Britain to leave the EU was a blow against the bosses and bankers of Europe—including those in the City of London, who lord it over workers in Britain.

And to those who point out how the hardcore racists and fascists seized on the Brexit vote to step up their race-hate provocations, I will say this: the answer to rac-

ist terror and anti-immigrant chauvinism does not lie in looking to the so-called good graces of the EU, which implements austerity and sets up immigrant concentration camps. The answer is mobilizing the multiracial and multinational proletariat at the head of all the oppressed.

That is definitely what needs to be done here in the U.S. In the last year, the race-terrorists, and that filth around the “alt-right,” have been taking their cue from the White House. They’ve fed off economic devastation. The new fascist organizations in the U.S. are small, but they’re growing, armed and dangerous. Their ultimate aim is racial genocide and the destruction of unions and the left.

The misery and discontent of the working class and oppressed can fuel the rise of a fighting workers movement. We talk about how organized labor must urgently mobilize to stop the fascists. Labor has a great weapon: its social power, numbers, collective organization and ability to choke off profits through strike action. In the factories, the transit barns and on the docks, the workplace remains the main site of integration in racist America, where the majority of black people remain a forcibly segregated race-color caste at the bottom.

The early union misleaders’ refusal to organize black workers gave the bosses the ability to use them against the unions—to the benefit of no one but the racist capitalists. It took organizing white and black workers side by side to forge the industrial unions in the 1930s, building picket lines that no scab dared cross.

If an integrated militant fight by organized labor seems improbable today, it’s because this generation has seen little to no real union struggle. Why is union membership half of what it was 30 years ago? How did the bosses get away with implementing “right to work” laws in 28 states? The trade-union misleaders bear much of this responsibility. They have fed patriotism and protectionist poison and begged the politicians for the right to live. They have chained the working class to the Democratic Party and therefore to its class enemy.

Yes, its enemy. When the Commander-in-Chief is an unabashed chauvinist and bigot, we have to remember who *all* our enemies are. The Democrats would have you believe that the nemesis is Russian strongman Vladimir Putin, who supposedly organized an army of hackers and trolls to subvert American “democracy.” Not so fast. The Trump-Russia collusion story is a big distraction by the same media pundits who manufacture the lies for war abroad. Malcolm X called the media the most powerful entity on earth that can “make the innocent guilty” and “make the guilty innocent.”

So, when the bourgeois media becomes the judge, jury and executioner against anyone accused of sexual misconduct, it should cause some apprehension. Sexual harassment is a serious problem; sexual assault and rape are serious crimes—and they’re regularly covered up in the workplace, in the military, and especially in the prisons. But the mainstream #MeToo movement has flattened any distinction between trivial acts—which very well

could be offensive and unpleasant—and criminal acts. The media treats anything from a wink to a sleazeball comment like an act of coercion and violence, convicting all suspects without any due process. And that never bodes well for anyone outside bourgeois convention and especially not for black men, who are the main victims of lynch mob “justice” in this country.

The anti-Trump “resistance” gave birth to the liberal feminist #MeToo movement we see today. It was a way for the Democrats to keep up the ruse that Hillary Clinton—that imperialist hawk and wolf of Wall Street—represented some kind of advancement for women, and to pretend that they defend women’s rights. It was also a way for the Democrats to go after the “pussy grabber in chief” for his morals. Meanwhile, the rulers can get on with their crimes: nuclear war threats, union-busting, and, don’t forget, the gutting of abortion rights. Despite the formal existence of *Roe v. Wade*, 43 states outlaw most abortions after a certain point in pregnancy. There are more than 1,000 state restrictions making it impossible for the vast majority of women to have the procedure. One-third of those restrictions were enacted in the past seven years.

Where was the “resistance” when access to abortion was being dismantled? Where was the “resistance” when Obama deported more people than any other president in U.S. history? Where was the “resistance” when the livelihoods of black and working people were being destroyed by Wall Street? We want there to be protests and opposition to the depravities of this system. But this “resistance” is really about getting the Democrats back into the halls of power. And in power, they will try to crush us as they’ve always done. They will use any means to divide working people, primarily through race.

What makes America America is the all-sided brutal oppression of black people. To sweep away this rotting, decaying America means shattering this oppression. It’s in the interests of all workers, including white workers and immigrants, to take up this fight. The struggle for black liberation through socialist revolution is also a struggle for the liberation of all the working masses, women and all the oppressed in this country.

That is why any discontent needs to be directed against the capitalist class enemy, independently of the Democrats and other false friends. Our goal is for the working class to take power, to become the ruling class through workers revolution, as the workers did in Russia through the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The continuity of revolutionary Marxism, of communism, is Trotskyism. Only with a Trotskyist program and the establishment of an egalitarian socialist society will the resources of society be able to be used for the benefit of all. For such a struggle to go forward to victory, we need to build a multiracial revolutionary workers party. Join the Spartacist League to make future years, future generations, better. ■



Photograph published in 1952 shows Royal Marine posing with severed heads of suspected militants killed in suppression of anti-colonial struggle in Malaya.

a base in the unions and a pro-capitalist programme, seeks only to divert workers’ anger back into the safe channels of parliamentary shadow-boxing.

If the proletariat is to triumph over its exploiters, it needs a steeled and disciplined revolutionary vanguard party at its head, a party of the kind forged by Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin in Russia. In Britain, such a party will be built by breaking Labour’s working-class base away from its pro-capitalist misleaders, left as well as right. Rather than the Labour Party’s broad church, infected with chauvinism and ruling-class scorn, the workers need a party that will champion all the exploited and oppressed. ■

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Myanmar...

(continued from page 8)

rulers, predominantly Bamars from the central lowland of the Irrawaddy River valley, lord over a myriad of nationally oppressed peoples, including the Shan, Mon, Kachin, Karen, Chin and Wa. Since Myanmar gained independence from Britain in 1948, many of these ethnic groups have engaged in insurgencies of varying levels of intensity to assert separatist claims or to attain some form of autonomy or greater rights. Among them are the Rakhine Buddhists, who are the largest group inhabiting the state that bears their name.

While many of Myanmar’s peoples suffer under Bamar rule, the Rohingya, with their distinctive South Asian features, language and religion, are the most vulnerable. Unlike larger ethnic minorities that have greater military capacity and occupy the inaccessible rugged and mountainous terrains of the frontiers, the Rohingya are relatively small in numbers and reside in the coastal plain of Rakhine state. Denigrated as “Bengali” foreign intruders, they are denied Myanmar citizenship—codified in a 1982 law—rendering them stateless, even though they have lived in Rakhine for generations. Bangladesh does not allow the Rohingya citizenship, either. In the mid 1990s, some 200,000 of them were forcibly repatriated to Myanmar, a process overseen by the United Nations; today, Bangladesh again wants to expel the Rohingya.

These stateless people desperately need their own independent state in what is now north Rakhine, both as an elementary measure of protection for those still there and to permit the safe return of the million-plus Rohingya now in the diaspora. Rohingya Muslims have repeatedly expressed their desire for separation from Myanmar since the time of the country’s independence, when they waged an armed struggle seeking to be part of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). At other times, they have agitated for autonomy. In armed clashes between the ARSA or other Rohingya insurgents and the Tatmadaw (Myanmar military), revolutionary Marxists militarily side with the Rohingya, who are locked in a struggle for existence. We uphold full equality and democratic rights for all the peoples in Myanmar, including the right to self-determination, and raise the call: Tatmadaw out of Rakhine! For an independent Rohingya state!

The Buddhist chauvinists want to erase all memory of the Rohingya in accordance with the policy of “Burmanization,” an ultranationalist ideology based on asserting the mythical racial purity of the Bamar ethnicity and upholding the conservative Theravada Buddhist faith. (The same form of Buddhism is dominant in Sri Lanka, where it promotes violence against Tamil Hindus and Christians, and in Thailand, where it targets Mus-

Myanmar “democracy icon” Aung San Suu Kyi receives U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2012, flanked by Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton. As State Counsellor, Suu Kyi has presided over terror campaign against Rohingya people.



lims.) Burmanization’s loudest advocates include extremist monks of the Buddhist organizations 969 and the Committee to Protect Race and Religion (or Ma Ba Tha). But they are not the only ones inciting holy war. In October, Sitagu Sayadaw, a supposedly “pacifist” monk, gave a sermon to a group of army officers that invoked a parable about an ancient Sri Lankan king who was advised not to grieve for the many non-Buddhists he killed in battle because they were not human beings.

The monks and their organizations are backed by the Tatmadaw and Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy. A darling of the U.S. and other imperialists, Suu Kyi was showered with accolades, from the Nobel Peace Prize to the Congressional Gold Medal. Liberals embraced her as a “champion of democracy and human rights.” Truth is, she is a Buddhist chauvinist who denounces the Rohingya as “terrorists” and Bengali “foreigners” and dismisses their massacre as “a huge iceberg of misinformation.” As State Counsellor, she is presiding over the terror campaign against the Rohingya. Two decades ago, well before Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and assumed office, our comrades of the Spartacist League of Australia succinctly described her role as “a very thin ‘democratic’ veneer to the continued brutal exploitation of the workers and peasants” (*Australasian Spartacist* No. 159, Spring 1996).

One of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia, Myanmar has suffered from decades of economic stagnation and isolation. After the return to a nominally civilian government, large chunks of state/military-owned enterprises were sold off at rock-bottom prices, largely to a small circle of military cronies. The end of sanctions by the West and the passage of new laws over the same period have opened the economy to international capital. Major corporations from Coca-Cola to Chevron and General Electric are moving in to get a piece of the action. Textile barons are scrambling to set up poverty-wage sweatshops employing largely young female workers.

It is in the interest of the country’s small but growing working class, itself multiethnic, to take up the cause of the Rohingya and other minorities. The Myanmar regime whips up anti-Muslim fervor to deflect workers from struggle against the ravages of capitalism and the relentless violence unleashed by those at the top of society.

U.S. Imperialism and China in Myanmar

In September, the Trump administration urged the UN Security Council to take “strong and swift action” to end violence against the Rohingya. This rhetoric was pure hypocrisy. The U.S. imperialists have one overriding strategic objective in Myanmar: countering China, the largest and most powerful of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states.

When Barack Obama first assumed the presidency in 2009, he initiated a new policy of engagement with the Myanmar military to pull the country away from China’s orbit. As Swedish journalist Bertil Lintner documented in his book *Great Game East* (2015):

“In early December 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton paid a visit to Burma, the first by a high-level American official in more than half a century. While paying lip service to democracy and human rights, it was clear that China’s growing influence in Burma was a major concern. Hillary raised Burma’s ties with China—and North Korea—in her talks with the new Burmese president, Thein Sein, and strategic interests have now returned to the forefront of Washington’s Burma policy.”

Obama himself subsequently made two separate trips to Myanmar, promoting stronger trade and security relations. In 2016, the Obama White House feted Suu Kyi, U.S. imperialism’s chief political asset in Myanmar, and lifted economic sanctions against the country. The last of these was scrapped that December, with the Democratic president declaring that Myanmar had made “substantial progress in improving human rights.” At the time, the Tatmadaw was sweeping through Rakhine in yet another savage anti-Rohingya offensive.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the imperialists imposed sanctions on impoverished Myanmar in a cynical maneuver to isolate its military regime. As a result, China became the country’s main foreign investor, gaining a foothold in every sector of the economy. In recent years, China has begun extensive infrastructure development there. As part of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, oil and gas pipelines were built from southwestern China to coastal Rakhine. A nearby Chinese-owned deep-sea port on the Bay of Bengal, now under construction, will provide China with an alternative route for energy imports that bypasses the chokepoint of the Malacca Straits.

As Trotskyists, we stand for the unconditional military defense of the Chinese deformed workers state against imperialism and the forces of capitalist counter-revolution. Despite the rule of a parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy, the overthrow of capitalism in the 1949 Revolution and establishment of an economy centrally based on collectivized property forms were historic gains for the world’s working people. Key to our defense of the Chinese Revolution is the struggle for proletarian political revolution to oust

the Stalinist misleaders and replace them with a regime of workers democracy committed to the fight for world socialism.

While we support Beijing’s right to enter into economic relations with whatever capitalist country it so chooses, we recognize that the ruling bureaucracy is guided by narrow nationalist interests, which are rooted in the anti-revolutionary dogma of “building socialism in one country.” Thus, China lends its political and military support to the junta in Myanmar, which viciously represses workers, ethnic minorities and the rural poor.

Since 1988, China has been the Tatmadaw’s top supplier of military hardware, including armored vehicles, artillery, aircraft, missiles and naval vessels. (Playing both sides of the fence, Beijing has also armed, to a lesser extent, the United Wa State Army and other insurgent groups.) Last May, the Chinese navy conducted its first-ever exercises with its Myanmar counterpart. Now the Beijing Stalinists are providing cover for the murderous generals in the name of stabilizing Rakhine, where China has large infrastructure investments. We oppose and condemn China’s military aid to Myanmar’s junta.

Colonial Divide and Rule

While a comparatively modern term, “Rohingya” simply means “inhabitant of Rohang,” the Muslim name for the formerly independent Buddhist kingdom of Arakan. From the early 15th century, the Rohingya served in the Arakan court and settled as traders in its dominion.



The Burmese king, having staked claims for submission, tribute and slaves across much of what now constitutes Myanmar, conquered Arakan in the mid 1780s.

Burmese control of the territory was short-lived, as the British seized Arakan in 1824 during the first of three Anglo-Burmese wars. Colonial rule, by design, greatly aggravated tensions between the Arakanese (Rakhine Buddhists) and a rapidly growing Muslim population. With Arakan incorporated into British India, hundreds of thousands of Bengalis readily emigrated there to toil in the fields, which the colonial masters had handed over to largely Indian Muslim landlords.

After completing the conquest of the Burmese in 1886, the British drew Burma’s borders and constituted it as a single province within the Indian empire. Forcibly lumping together extremely diverse and potentially antagonistic peoples in a single state, while simultaneously playing them off against one another in line with their policy of divide to better subjugate, the British stoked the fires of communal violence. Notably, Indians, both Hindu and Muslim, were promoted at the expense of the Burmese and others. The administrative units of “Burma Proper” were policed, taxed and ruled by a new layer of officials, mostly brought over from the subcontinent. British army units composed of Indian

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6

WORKERS VANGUARD

Syria...

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militias—in the war against ISIS. In the U.S.-led war on ISIS in Iraq and Syria, we Marxists stressed that every blow ISIS struck against the U.S. and its proxies coincided with the interests of the U.S. and international proletariat. This understanding does not lessen in the least our Marxist opposition to everything that those arch-reactionary cutthroats stand for.

Last September, with ISIS largely defeated in Iraq, the KDP held a referendum on independence for Iraqi Kurdistan, with Kurds almost unanimously voting “yes.” We welcomed the referendum and its result while maintaining our political opposition to the bourgeois nationalists. The KDP had no intention of implementing the independence vote. But this did not matter to the KDP’s paymasters in Washington, who denounced the referendum and, in its aftermath, assented to the Iraqi army’s seizure of the historically Kurdish city of Kirkuk and its oil-rich province (see “Iraqi Kurds Vote for Independence, Baghdad Seizes Kirkuk” [WV No. 1120, 20 October]). Tens of thousands of Kurds were subsequently driven out.

With ISIS now on the ropes in Syria, the YPG might already be losing its usefulness to the imperialists. A portent of what might befall them was captured by a *New York Times* (25 January) article headlined “Allies or Terrorists: Who Are the Kurdish Fighters in Syria?” Making a grotesque and provocative amalgam that PKK/PYD leader Abdullah Öcalan is “viewed by Turks the same way Americans viewed Osama bin Laden,” the article reported that “American officials have told the Kurds that the United States will not fight Turkey for them.” We recall that in July 2015 the U.S. gave Ankara the green light to launch airstrikes in northern Iraq against the PKK in return for Turkish permission for the U.S. to use the Incirlik air base to launch bombing attacks on ISIS. As the all-sided conflict in Syria enters a new phase, the Kurds may well be among the main losers.

Left liberals and ostensible Marxists in the U.S., Germany and elsewhere have been the biggest cheerleaders for the PYD, presenting the Rojava Kurdish autonomous region as a bastion of women’s emancipation, democracy and religious pluralism. There is a cruel irony in the left-nationalist PYD’s embrace of

American imperialism. In “Dark Victory in Raqqa” (*New Yorker*, 6 November), Luke Mogelson noted a case of the “many strange bedfellows” produced by the Syrian civil war, including that “in Rojava, Kurds often refer to Donald Trump as *Bêvê şoreş*—‘Father of the Revolution.’” Pointing to how the YPG “lost thousands of our brothers and sisters in the war against the Islamic State,” a *New York Times* (29 January) op-ed piece by Nujin Derik, a leader of the YPG’s female unit in Afrin, now calls on the U.S. to impose



Iraqi government forces take down Kurdish flag in Kirkuk region, October 17. U.S. supported Iraq’s military takeover of region from *pesh merga* following Kurdish independence vote.

“a no-flight zone over Afrin and the rest of Rojava.”

The YPG has been open about its alliance with U.S. imperialism. Not so its fans in the reformist Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI, whose U.S. affiliate is Socialist Alternative). Most recently, the CWI’s British affiliate issued a declaration upholding the Syrian Kurds’ “right to defend themselves” against the Turkish intervention. In the declaration, the CWI coyly speaks of the YPG fighting “alongside airstrikes from Russia and the US” against ISIS, thereby concealing—and certainly not opposing—the YPG’s role as spotters and ground troops for the U.S. (“Erdogan Regime Launches Bombing and Ground Invasion Against Kurds,” 26 January). The article hails the war against ISIS for supposedly creating

“the possibility of breaking down imperialism’s borders” in the Near East. In fact, with the help of the YPG, the U.S. imperialists have extended their reach even further in the Near East, promising yet more horrific bloodshed.

Turkish Proletariat and Defense of the Kurds

The CWI’s line of siding with the YPG in Syria against the assault by Turkey is in sharp contrast with its refusal to defend the PKK against the Turkish military in

Turkey. In the summer of 2015, at the start of a Turkish government offensive against the PKK that would kill hundreds of civilians and displace some half a million people, the CWI’s British group published an article that condemned the PKK’s “individual armed actions” as “counter-productive” without so much as hinting that the international proletariat has a side in Turkey in defense of the PKK (socialistworld.net, 28 July 2015).

Why does the CWI defend the PYD in Syria but not the PKK in Turkey? Because these social democrats lend their support to those whom the “democratic” imperialists support. As Marxists, we defend the PKK against the Turkish state, as should the workers movement in Turkey. At the same time, we oppose the PKK’s petty-bourgeois program, which does not even

call for Kurdish independence but raises at most the prospect of autonomy within the Turkish capitalist state.

In Turkey, the Erdogan regime is cracking down on anyone opposing the attack on Afrin, rounding up hundreds of people in the name of fighting PKK “terrorism.” Anti-Kurdish chauvinism is a defining element of Turkish nationalism and a key prop of capitalist rule there. If the proletariat in Turkey is to ever liberate itself from capitalist exploitation, it must take up the fight for Kurdish self-determination. Kurdish struggle in Iran could shake up the structure of that theocratic prison house of peoples, where the Persian-chauvinist regime presides over a population nearly half of which is non-Persian.

The struggle for Kurdish national liberation, combined with the fight against imperialist occupation, could be a motor force for a proletarian upsurge in the region. By championing Kurdish self-determination, the working masses of the Near East would be taking a stand against their own capitalist exploiters and helping to undercut U.S. imperialism’s capacity to manipulate the Kurds’ grievances to further its interests. The key task for Marxists is to build revolutionary workers parties that champion the cause of the Kurdish people, women and all the oppressed in the struggle to overthrow capitalist rule. The perspective of the International Communist League is to win class-conscious militants to build such parties as sections of a reformed Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution.

The fight for the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed in the Near East and the rest of the Third World would be incomplete and reversible without the perspective of workers socialist revolution in the imperialist centers. In Germany, Kurds as well as Turks represent an important component of the working class, and can constitute a bridge between the struggles of workers in the Near East and those in the imperialist centers. In the U.S., the multiracial working class has every interest in opposing the depredations of its exploiters. The capitalist rulers’ drive to assert their domination of the oil-rich Near East and the rest of the globe goes hand in hand with their insatiable drive to wrest ever more profit out of the labor and lives of working people at home. As the U.S. section of the ICL, the Spartacist League dedicates itself to building a multiracial revolutionary workers party committed to proletarian rule. ■

troops were deployed to suppress Burmese resistance to colonial rule. The British also relied on ethnic minorities—the so-called “martial races” like the Karen, Kachin and Chin—for military manpower.

The often-violent tensions between all these groups exploded with the Japanese invasion of Burma during World War II. Burmese nationalists, led by Aung San, Suu Kyi’s father, fought on the side of the Japanese (before switching to the British at the war’s end when it became clear Japan would lose). Tens of thousands of Indians attempting to escape the country were butchered, including by Aung San’s forces. In the course of the interimperialist conflict, Arakan descended into a brutal civil war that pitted Muslims against Buddhists. By the end of that fighting, the Muslims were compacted in the north of Arakan and the Buddhists in the south.

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was founded on the eve of WWII, in August 1939, largely by student leaders of the militant nationalist Dohbama Asiayone (“Our Burma Association”), including Aung San. Although elected secretary-general, Aung San decamped from the CPB soon after. The CPB never had a commitment to the Marxist principle of proletarian class independence from all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces. During the war, the loosely organized Communists lent their services to the British imperialists in accordance with the line issued by the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. After Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 and the wartime alliance between Britain and the USSR was sealed, the Comintern

promulgated the “People’s War Against Fascism” and all-out support for the war effort in the Allied imperialist countries and their colonies.

By helping the British reconquer Burma, the CPB betrayed the anti-colonial struggle. In fact, the Communists were the initial go-betweens for Aung San and the British at the war’s end and to that end set up a popular front, that is, a political bloc with the bourgeois nationalists. The CPB’s class collaboration had a predictable outcome. Just over a year after the Aung San-led popular front—at Britain’s invitation—took the reins of the postwar capitalist government, the Communists were expelled from its ranks and targeted for severe state repression.

From May 1945, workers strikes in the cities and peasant revolts in the countryside had come under Communist leadership. With independence negotiations underway, *Time* magazine (3 February 1947) reported that Aung San “liked the idea of British troops staying awhile to help him control the Reds, some of whom could not even be controlled by Moscow.” Although that idea did not come to pass, the next year the hammer came down on the CPB, which abandoned the cities, adopting a peasant-based guerrilla strategy. In 1989, the CPB collapsed.

The Fight for Permanent Revolution

Resource-rich Myanmar is marked by combined and uneven development, with stark contrasts of wealth and poverty, of new industry and unspeakable squalor.

The British imperialists threw fuel on every manner of special oppression inherited from the past, and the generals continue to fan the flames of communalist terror. What is needed is revolutionary proletarian opposition to both the imperialist powers and local capitalist rulers. The way forward is shown by the program of permanent revolution, developed by Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky and verified by the Russian October Revolution. Trotsky recognized that in backward, semicolonial countries, the achievement of modernization and liberation from the imperialist yoke requires smashing capitalist rule, which would clear the path for socialist development.

The socialist liberation of Myanmar, where 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture for its livelihood, requires looking not only to the fledgling working class there but also to the massive proletarian concentrations in its neighboring countries: India, Bangladesh, Thailand and China. Myanmar’s exploited and oppressed, from those of South Asian and Chinese origin to the ethnic groups on the Thai border, have significant links to all these countries. What is posed is the need to forge proletarian internationalist parties committed to the overthrow of capitalist rule in the region as well as to political revolution in the Chinese deformed workers state. Within Myanmar itself, it is vital to plant the seeds of Marxism and cohere the cadres who would struggle to build a genuinely Leninist party that acts as the tribune of the people, including by championing the right of self-determination for


all oppressed national minorities.

This perspective must be tied to the fight for socialist revolution in the U.S. and other imperialist centers. We fight to reforge Leon Trotsky’s Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. When those who labor rule on a global scale, technology and industrial development will be tapped to lift the world’s masses out of want and misery on the road to building a secular, classless communist society free of communal, national and religious conflict. ■

International Communist League Pamphlet

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Genocidal Terror in Myanmar



Getty photos

Rohingya Muslim refugees flee into Bangladesh to escape Myanmar military's ethnic cleansing drive, November 2017. Mumtaz Begum (inset), one of many victims who have suffered through burned villages, murdered families and systematic rape.

For an Independent Rohingya State!

In late August, the military of Myanmar (Burma) launched a systematic campaign of massacre, rape and arson against the deeply oppressed Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, killing thousands and fueling a mass exodus to neighboring Bangladesh. Nearly 700,000 people, some two-thirds of the Rohingya population, have fled the northern part of Myanmar's western state of Rakhine (formerly Arakan), their small villages burned to the ground. The pre-text for this latest scorched-earth carnage

was an attack by lightly armed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) fighters on police posts and an army base in Rakhine that reportedly left 12 security personnel and at least 59 Rohingya dead.

Genocidal terror at the hands of the armed forces is nothing new for the beleaguered Rohingya. They have been kept subjugated and impoverished by the generals from the ethnic Burmese (Bamar) Buddhist majority, who remain the real power in Myanmar despite the "democratic tran-

sition" that began in 2011. Especially since the 1962 military coup, the Rohingya have increasingly been subjected to organized state violence—arbitrary arrests, forced labor, restriction of travel and marriage, destruction of mosques and seizure of their lands. To limit their population, the government bars them from having more than two children. In 1977 and again in 1991, the military carried out "cleaning operations" that resulted in some half million people being forced out. The latest

wave of Rohingyans to enter Bangladesh's squalid camps join some 300,000 who escaped previous attacks, while nearly a million more are overwhelmingly in other Muslim-majority countries. Many of those still in Rakhine are interned in camps, surrounded by government forces and hostile Buddhist communities and denied work, education and medical care.

Myanmar is a prison house for over 135 ethno-linguistic groups. The country's

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Spartacist Speaker at NYC Holiday Appeal

Black Oppression: What Makes America America

The following speech, edited for publication, was delivered by Spartacist speaker Laura Zamora at the Partisan Defense Committee's 32nd annual Holiday Appeal for Class-War Prisoners in New York City on January 27.

On New Year's Day, a few of us woke up to messages reassuring us that "this year will be better." I found this 2018 catchphrase rather annoying and anti-scientific—Marxists don't believe in crystal balls. I also knew why people

were cursing last year, and it ends with the word Trump. One year into this new chapter of the evil empire, the U.S. rulers have continued their war against working people, the poor, black people, immigrants, women, gay and trans people. They've kept up their imperialist wars and occupations against the poor and dispossessed abroad.

Liberals are very fond of blaming everything on the Orange Vader Trump, as if nothing like this has happened

before. Trump is, after all, an easy target—the big bully of racist American capitalism. He shows the rulers' most primal urge for profit and power without the hypocritical pretense of "democratic values." We're in a midterm year; the Democrats say: "Take our country back." Take it back? This country was founded through racist bloodshed, the genocide of Native Americans. U.S. capitalism was built upon the backs of black people—from slavery to convict

labor, from the chain gang to the assembly line. Both Republicans and Democrats rule in the interest of the capitalist class and its profit system: the difference is that one party is better at putting lipstick on the pig. When we hear people talking about the "resistance" these days, it's just about resisting Trump and the Republicans. It's not about resisting the misery, exploitation and bigotry inherent to the capitalist order.

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