

Imperialist Strikes and Anti-Russia Provocations

U.S. Out of Syria Now!



Above: U.S. Tomahawk missile launched in Syria offensive, April 14. Right: Aftermath of imperialist bombing of Syrian Scientific Research Center in Damascus district of Barzeh.



U.S. Navy (inset); AP

APRIL 16—Having bled Syria for years, stoking the fires of a civil war that has claimed the lives of half a million people and devastated much of the country, the U.S., with the support of the British and French imperialists, launched more than 100 missiles at Syrian government installations on the night of April 13. The targets included a scientific research facility in Damascus, one of the few Syrian cities with a semblance of normalcy. The pretext for the strikes was an alleged April 7 chemical weapons attack in Douma by the Bashar al-Assad regime. The imperialists claim that the Syrian military

killed dozens of people and wounded hundreds with chlorine or sarin gas (or a combination of both). The Syrian government and Russia, its main ally, deny the accusation. While the imperialists have avoided directly hitting Russian military targets (so far), the missile strikes represent a naked act of aggression aimed at asserting Washington’s power in the Near East, most centrally against Moscow. And it is the Democratic Party that has been spearheading the crazed anti-Russia drive in the U.S. Following the alleged chemical weapons attack, Democratic House leader

Nancy Pelosi declared that Russian president Vladimir Putin “must be held accountable.” In an April 10 editorial, the *New York Times* complained that a statement by Trump indicating that he wanted to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria reinforced “Russia’s reprehensible behavior.” The bluster from Democrats and the *Times* for a “coherent strategy” in Syria is aimed at goading the scandal-prone Trump administration into a more aggressive posture against Putin’s Russia, a nuclear-armed regional power. Indeed, the White House recently expelled 60 Russian diplomats and imposed sanctions

on seven of Putin’s associates, a dozen of their companies and 17 Russian officials. Meanwhile, the U.S. is also gearing up to impose harsh new sanctions on Iran, the Assad regime’s other key ally. John Bolton, the hawkish new national security adviser, has called for bombing Iran and has declared that the U.S. will bring about “regime change” before the Islamic Republic’s 40th anniversary next February. For its part, the Israeli military has stepped up its attacks in Syria—including by targeting Iranian bases in the country—having launched over 100 airstrikes since 2012. *continued on page 2*

Down With Labor Tops’ Protectionist Poison!

Trump, Democrats Threaten China with Trade War

The Trump administration’s threat to impose tariffs on more than \$150 billion worth of imports may well signal the opening of an economic war on China. Prominent Democratic Party spokesmen, who normally denounce every tweet and policy pronouncement of the Republican president, have signed on to this anti-China crusade. So too have the top leaders of the trade-union bureaucracy, which has long combined chauvinist “America First” protectionism with anti-Communist China-bashing. Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer said he wanted to give Trump “a

big pat on the back” for “doing the right thing when it comes to China.” Bernie Sanders, the darling of the reformist left, recently stated, “I think the main target of our concern has got to be China” and reiterated his longstanding call for comprehensive measures against Chinese imports. For their part, the AFL-CIO tops are demanding concerted action by “America and our allies” to “bring tough pressure to bear on China,” while Steelworkers union leaders say they want to “work with the adminis-

tration” against China to “rebuild our nation’s manufacturing sector and protect national security.” At the same time, the American capitalists are far from unanimous in backing Trump’s tariff threats. U.S. agribusiness interests are up in arms at the thought of retaliatory tariffs by Beijing cutting off their profitable Chinese export market. Major retailers like Walmart and Costco protested that tariffs would raise the cost of basic household items. Many U.S. manufacturers,

including in auto, have warned that the impact of new tariffs on today’s complex international supply chains would drive up their cost of production, undercut competitiveness and trigger layoffs. The U.S. moves against China are loaded with contradictions. Not only are the two countries’ economies closely tied through trade, but China is the biggest holder of U.S. government debt. Bourgeois spokesmen opposed to Trump’s tariffs, including a hefty chunk *continued on page 4*

Defend China Against Imperialism!

Syria...

(continued from page 1)

When it comes to slaughtering civilians, the U.S. imperialists are second to none. According to the Airwars website, the U.S.-led coalition has butchered nearly 10,000 civilians in Syria and Iraq since 2014, having carried out some 30,000 airstrikes. From the 1991 Gulf War and the United Nations-imposed sanctions to the 2003 invasion and its aftermath, the U.S. and its “democratic” allies are responsible for snuffing out nearly three million lives in Iraq alone.

It takes some chutzpah for the U.S. to shed tears over the supposed use of chemical weapons. Napalm was unleashed on the masses of Korea and those of Vietnam, where millions were also exposed to Agent Orange, during U.S. imperialism’s counter-revolutionary wars in those countries. More recently, the U.S. used white phosphorus in Iraq during the 2004 assault on Falluja and the 2016 attack on Mosul. It has acknowledged using depleted uranium in Syria in 2015 in the war against the Islamic State. And, of course, no howls of outrage are heard from America’s politicians and media when U.S. allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia employ these weapons against defenseless populations in Gaza and Yemen.

As Marxists, we have no side in the Syrian civil war, which is reactionary and communal on all sides. But we do have a side against the U.S. and other imperialists. It is in the vital interest of the international proletariat, not least in the U.S., to oppose the depredations of U.S. imperialism and demand: *All imperialist forces out of Syria and the Near East now!* We also oppose

the regional powers that have become involved in the Syrian conflict—including Russia, Iran, Israel and Turkey—and demand that they also get out.

On Saturday, Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, threatened that the U.S. military is “locked and loaded” for further attacks. In the event of a full-on war against the Assad regime, Marxists would have a military side with Assad’s forces while maintaining our political opposition to his brutal capitalist government.

Imperialist Deceptions

We do not know what happened in Douma on April 7, although there is every reason to suspect that the imperialists’ account is “fake news.” In an article in the London *Independent* (16 April), Robert Fisk, one of the few Western journalists in Douma, quotes a local doctor who told him that the video of panicked residents “is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia [oxygen starvation amid the suffocating rubble]—not gas poisoning.” The U.S. imperialists have a long track record of fabricating evidence to justify war: from the lies about the sinking of the USS *Maine*, which paved the way for the 1898 Spanish-American War; to the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was used as a pretext to escalate U.S. forces in Vietnam; to the claims that Saddam Hussein had “weapons of mass destruction” and was complicit in the September 11 attacks, which served to beat the drums of war against Iraq.

Last year’s alleged chemical weapons attack at Khan Sheikhoun, which was also blamed on the Syrian government, took place days after Trump announced that his administration accepted that Assad

would remain in power. It was followed by the U.S. bombing of a Syrian air base. This year’s attack took place shortly after Trump stated his intention to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria and cut off funding to opposition rebels. In both cases, the main source of information regarding the purported chemical attacks was the “White Helmets.” The media presents this group as being made up of dedicated, impartial rescue volunteers. In fact, this outfit was set up and financed by, among others, the U.S. and Britain, and is allied with the Islamist rebels (see “Syrian ‘White Helmets’: Tools of U.S. Imperialism,” WV No. 1103, 13 January 2017).

As demonstrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, the imperialists’ stories around the Khan Sheikhoun attack are highly dubious. After the *New Yorker* and *London Review of Books* (which commissioned his investigation) refused to publish his account, the German newspaper *Die Welt* (25 June 2017) printed a report by Hersh revealing that U.S. intelligence services knew that the Khan Sheikhoun site was hit by a conventional bomb. Russia had told the U.S. in advance of the attack, which targeted a meeting of high-level jihadists. According to Hersh’s sources, the conventional bomb triggered secondary explosions from the weapons

cache in the building that could have generated a toxic cloud. Even Secretary of Defense James Mattis acknowledged this February that there was “no evidence” that Assad had used sarin gas in Khan Sheikhoun.

The struggle against imperialist militarism and war must be linked to a program for the overthrow of the world imperialist order by the working class. The same ruling class that rains down bombs on the masses of the Near East also wages class war on the working people at home. When the U.S. feigns outrage over Assad killing his “own people,” remember that cops in this country gun down over 1,000 people every year, many of them black and Latino. As we wrote after last year’s missile strikes on Syrian forces (“Defend North Korea! U.S. Out of Syria!” WV No. 1110, 21 April 2017):

“What is desperately needed is class struggle against the capitalist rulers, both to defend the interests of workers and the oppressed at home and to oppose U.S. imperialism abroad. The Spartacist League and our comrades in the International Communist League aim to win the most conscious layers of the working class to the understanding that what is necessary to put an end to exploitation, racial oppression and imperialist slaughter is the overturn of the capitalist order in the U.S. and internationally through socialist revolution.” ■

Letter

On African Refugees in Israel

17 March 2018

Dear comrades,

The caption for the main back page photo of WV No. 1129 (9 March) [“Israel: African Migrants Face Mass Expulsion”] includes a factual error. It states that the February 22 migrant demo went from the Holot detention center “toward another detention center” in the Negev Desert. In fact the migrants were marching to Saharonim *Prison*. This may sound picky, but there is a real difference. Holot is a so-called “open” facility that migrants could leave so long as they checked in three times a day and returned at night; thus the ability to stage the protest. Saharonim, in contrast, is a full-scale prison with all that that implies. The Zionist regime has repeatedly stated that if the detainees in Holot do not accept the “offer” of expulsion, they will be imprisoned indefinitely in Saharonim. In fact, the immediate precipitant for the protest was the transfer of seven asylum-seekers to Saharonim during the previous week.

Three days ago (i.e., after the WV article), the regime actually closed Holot, which cabinet ministers incredibly claimed had become a “comfortable” alternative for asylum-seekers. Their intent remains to imprison all those who do not accept expulsion, though the expulsions have temporarily been blocked by a High Court ruling. For now, those removed from Holot have simply been banned from liv-

ing or working in any of the seven major cities that have African refugee communities, i.e., the only places where they might have a possibility of receiving support. In the words of an article on the Israeli left-liberal website +972, “The hundreds of asylum seekers who were released this week are free—temporarily—before they face the same impossible choice as their fellow refugees currently in Saharonim: indefinite imprisonment or deportation.”

Comradely,
John Masters

WV replies:

We thank comrade Masters for his correction. In early April, the Israeli government announced that it had reached an agreement to deport African refugees to several Western countries. However, that deal quickly fell apart. While wrangling continues between the government and the High Court, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made clear that his regime will try to deport the remaining 40,000 African migrants. (Already, some 20,000 have been pushed out over the past six years.) As the Israeli military continues its slaughter of protesters in Gaza—now numbering at least 34 dead and nearly 3,000 wounded—we underline that fighters for Palestinian national rights must raise, alongside the call to *defend the Palestinian people*, the demand to *stop the deportation of African asylum-seekers from Israel*. ■



TROTSKY

For Working-Class Political Independence!

Fighting for the continuity of Marxism in countries of belated capitalist development, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky condemned the class-collaborationist program of the Third International (Comintern) under Stalinist misleadership. The bloody defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution was prepared by the Comintern’s insistence that Chinese Communists join the Guomindang, a bourgeois party, prettifying it as a “workers and

peasants party.” Trotsky stressed that as part of its struggle to lead the petty-bourgeois peasant masses, the proletarian party must maintain its political independence.

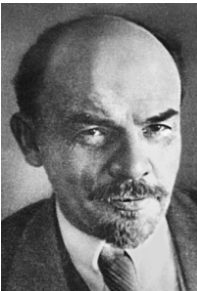
The Comintern leadership has already committed not a few mistakes in India. The conditions have not yet allowed these errors to reveal themselves on such a scale as in China. One can, therefore, hope that the lessons of the Chinese events will permit of a more timely rectification of the line of the leading policy in India and in other countries of the Orient.

The cardinal question for us here, as everywhere and always, is the question of the communist party, its complete independence, its irreconcilable class character. The greatest danger on this path is the organization of so-called “workers’ and peasants’ parties” in the countries of the Orient....

Marxism has always taught, and Bolshevism, too, accepted, and taught, that the peasantry and proletariat are two different classes, that it is false to identify their interests in capitalist society in any way, and that a peasant can join the communist party only if, from the property viewpoint, he adopts the views of the proletariat. The alliance of the workers and peasants under the dictatorship of the proletariat does not invalidate this thesis, but confirms it, in a different way, under different circumstances. If there were no *different* classes with *different* interests, there would be no talk even of an *alliance*. Such an alliance is compatible with the socialist revolution only to the extent that it enters into the iron framework of the dictatorship of the proletariat....

Those organizations which in capitalist countries label themselves peasant parties are in reality one of the varieties of bourgeois parties.

—Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (1928)



LENIN

WORKERS VANGUARD

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Government Mass Murder

“This is not an assault.” Twenty-five years ago, that was the lie blaring over government loudspeakers as the FBI and the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) carried out its plan to obliterate the Branch Davidians, an integrated group that formed as a breakaway from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Orchestrated and overseen at the highest levels of the Clinton administration, the 19 April 1993 assault outside Waco, Texas, engulfed the Branch Davidians’ Mount Carmel commune in an inferno that killed over 80 people, including some two dozen children.

The sole “crime” of religious leader David Koresh and his followers was being an obscure religious sect that insisted on being able to practice its faith and bear arms—two rights supposedly guaranteed by the Constitution. In executing the attack, the armed agents of the ruling class intended to send a message to all: defiance of authority will be met with death. And of those who managed to make it out alive, nine were railroaded to prison on various trumped-up charges.

The government tried to justify mass murder by selling the lie that Branch Davidians were hell-bent on mass suicide and had started the deadly fire themselves. A massive cover-up and web of falsehoods were spun through subsequent “investigations” and whitewashing reports. But mountains of video footage and witness testimony, including by the few survivors, showed that the truly deranged actors were the FBI and ATF—overseen by Attorney General Janet Reno and President Bill Clinton—who went in guns blazing against a small fringe group that wanted nothing more than to be left alone.

On that infamous morning, combat tanks rammed and wrecked the walls of the Branch Davidians’ complex, drenching the interior with lethal and flammable CS gas (the same used by the U.S. military in Vietnam), while trapping its inhabitants inside and preventing entry to firefighters and medical personnel. For over seven weeks prior to the April 19 offensive, Koresh and his supporters had been under siege by an array of heavily armed police forces while the Feds “negotiated.”

Part of the state’s barbaric tactics was engaging in psychological warfare: high-intensity floodlights blazed into the complex all night, while huge loudspeakers played Nancy Sinatra songs, Tibetan monks chanting, and the squeals of rabbits being slaughtered. Water and electricity were cut off as well as contact with the outside world. The Branch Davidians relied on unfurling makeshift banners to communicate to the world, including, “F.B.I. broke negotiations. We want press” and “Rodney King—We Understand.”

The drive behind the siege was to exact revenge for a failed February 28 assault during which ATF agents and National Guard helicopters surrounded Mount Carmel to arrest Koresh on false charges of possessing illegal weapons. During the raid, four federal agents and six Davidians were killed and several wounded, including Koresh, who was shot. Like just about any God-fearing resident of Texas who would blow someone away for trying to break down their door, the Branch Davidians exercised their right to defend themselves against the ATF assault.

The Waco massacre was the bloody signature of the Clinton years, just as for the Reagan years it was the 1985 massacre of MOVE: a mostly black back-to-nature commune known for denouncing “the system” and promoting armed self-defense. Alongside the ATF and FBI, the Philadelphia cops bombed MOVE’s home, killing eleven members, including five children, and burning down an entire black neighborhood. The carnage in both cases was preceded by media campaigns slandering the group under siege as a violent “cult”



Branch Davidian commune engulfed by fire during FBI assault, 19 April 1993. President Bill Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno ordered murderous attack that incinerated over 80 men, women and children. Reuters (inset); Getty

and was followed by the government punishing the few survivors. In fact, all three members of the Treasury department inquiry that whitewashed the Waco atrocity had been involved in the execution or cover-up of the MOVE massacre.

Immediately after Mount Carmel was burned to the ground, the Spartacist League organized protest demonstrations in several cities. We picketed federal government offices with signs including, “We Will Not Forget: MOVE Massacre, Desert Slaughter in Iraq, Waco Holocaust.” From the outset of the state’s vendetta, our defense of the Branch Davidians was unambiguous. In a protest letter to Clinton early in the siege, the Partisan Defense Committee—a legal and social

were so damned concerned for the children they unleashed an armed assault on the house they lived in and filled it full of bullet holes...gassed them, and ultimately burned them to death. Ain’t America great. I’m glad Mrs. Reno isn’t concerned about me.”

In fact, the year before the raid, Child Protective Services investigated and found no evidence of abuse at Mount Carmel. Children evacuated during the siege were interviewed by social workers, who found them to be “healthy, happy, well adjusted, well educated.” After the raid, Reno herself admitted that the lurid stories of “ongoing child abuse” were “inaccurate.” Breaking through the government’s brazen lies, which the liberals

had nothing to hide and Koresh had previously even invited the ATF to go inside and inspect his weapons! At least one of the Branch Davidians was a licensed federal firearms dealer, and the group operated a retail gun business, attending gun shows and storing inventory in order to secure an income from secondhand firearms upgrades.

What lay at the core of the government’s crusade was the push for stricter restraints on the right to bear arms, an opening shot for the newly elected “tough on crime” Clinton administration. The essence of gun control is this: the rulers are determined to maintain a monopoly of violence for themselves and their state, while deciding who are the “good” gun owners vs. the “bad.” It’s a way to leave the poor, minorities and working people defenseless and enforce conformity and submission. Waco proves that the U.S. government will go to any length to disarm the population, even if it has to kill them.

The Truth Behind the Lies

The recent six-part miniseries *Waco* on the Paramount Network is a compelling and honest portrayal of the Branch Davidians during the 51-day siege. Waco survivor David Thibodeau was instrumental in bringing much of the story to life based on his book, *Waco: A Survivor’s Story*, and acted as one of the show’s consultants. The series illustrates how those living in Mount Carmel were multiracial and multinational, representing people from all over the world who agreed on Koresh’s spiritual interpretation of the Bible. As the effective documentary footage in *Waco: The Rules of Engagement* (1997) also shows, the Branch Davidians were not the sociopaths painted by the press; they were simply devout individuals who, like many others, believed in a prophet—theirs happened to be David Koresh.

In one scene in the miniseries, a Dallas radio host, Ron Engelman (who was a lonely voice of support in the media during the actual siege) interviews a professor who aptly points out that the word “cult” is a way to denigrate somebody else’s tightly knit religious group: “The early Christians, by our definition, belonged to a cult.” Koresh’s followers were hardly brainwashed or coerced. His second-in-command, Steve Schneider, had been working toward a doctorate degree in theology. Another top aide was Wayne Martin, one of the earliest black men to graduate from Harvard Law

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WV Photo

Spartacist emergency demonstration outside New York Federal Building on day of Waco massacre.

defense organization associated with the SL—demanded that all troops, tanks, police and federal agents be removed from the area and pointed out: “We think you would do well to take the advice of the newly elected President Lincoln, who when asked what he proposed to do about the polygamous Mormons replied, ‘I propose to let them alone.’”

Reno’s twisted rationale for killing the children was to “save” them from Koresh, who was demonized as a gun-crazed, sadistic polygamist and child abuser. In a letter to the PDC by Bob Buck, a West Virginia steel worker railroaded to prison for defending his union during a bitter 1991-92 strike, he rightly noted: “They

dutifully echoed, we remarked: “Child abuse, guns, cultism—these are all cynical pretexts which have nothing to do with what happened on the morning of 19 April 1993. An authoritarian religious commune is not how most of us would choose to live our lives, but it’s none of the state’s business” (“Waco and the White House: First the Massacre, Now the Lies,” WV No. 575, 7 May 1993).

As Dick Reavis, author of *The Ashes of Waco*, repeatedly pointed out, the bulk of the ATF’s search warrant was about child abuse and statutory rape, even though the agency’s jurisdiction is over guns, not sexual offenses. In terms of those gun charges, the Branch Davidians

Trade War...

(continued from page 1)

of the Republican Congressional caucus, embrace what they call “free trade.” By this they mean the supposedly inherent right of U.S. imperialism to “freely” use its economic and military might to rip off weaker countries’ natural resources and drive their workers and peasants to starvation. Meanwhile, the capitalists have waged a decades-long onslaught in this country that has devastated the jobs and working and living conditions of tens of millions.

Countless factories have rusted into the ground after the bosses threw workers on the scrap heap and moved production elsewhere in a bid to boost profit margins. The ruling class has scuttled maintenance of roads, bridges, transit systems, airports, power grids, dams, water supplies—the very things needed for society to function. For years, the labor tops have screamed about low-wage workers overseas “stealing” American jobs, even as they have allowed much of the U.S. to become a low-wage outsourcing destination for both U.S. and foreign companies.

The labor misleaders claim that by pushing protectionism they are defending the livelihoods of working people against

the Chinese workers state against imperialism despite the ruling Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bureaucracy.

Imperialism, China and Trade War

While it is often hard to find rhyme or reason behind Trump’s pronouncements, in regard to China there is a clear program of economic and military belligerence. Trump’s top trade advisers, Peter Navarro and Robert Lighthizer, are anti-China hawks. The AFL-CIO bureaucrats have long lionized Navarro for his hard line against China. Six years ago, they organized screenings in Ohio Rust Belt towns of Navarro’s film *Death by China*, an anti-Communist diatribe that portrays the country as a trade cheat using currency manipulation, illegal subsidies, intellectual property theft and other measures to steal American jobs. Welcoming Navarro’s appointment as a Trump adviser, an AFL-CIO spokesman saluted his “important critiques of American trade policy” and looked forward to “working with him to translate that into real policies that benefit America’s workers.”

Trump launched his anti-China trade war in January with tariffs on solar panels. Where a decade ago China was only a minor player in solar panel manufactur-

United Steelworkers International president Leo Gerard joined Trump at signing of protectionist trade memorandum, April 2017. Labor misleaders promote lie that workers have a common “national interest” with capitalist rulers.



and computer industries. The “Made in China 2025” program, adopted by the Xi regime three years ago, aims to make China a global leader in artificial intelligence, advanced microchips, electric vehicles and other cutting-edge technologies. The imperialists are up in arms about such state-sponsored development, including China’s acquisition of technology through joint ventures and overseas purchases. In 2016, there was a backlash in Germany after a Chinese appliance maker bought Kuka, an advanced robotics company.

More recently, the White House blocked the takeover of the Qualcomm chip manufacturer by a Singapore-based company, fearing this would open the door for China, not the U.S., to become the main hardware provider for next-generation (5G) wireless communications networks. The policy is again bipartisan: the Obama administration blocked similar deals on national-security grounds.

Trump’s invoking of national security in announcing the steel and aluminum tariffs was derided by much of the capitalist media. But military-strategic considerations are a central component of Washington’s moves. Advanced computer/communications technology is critical to China’s defense against imperialism. The London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies recently concluded that China had become a military innovator that is “not merely ‘catching up’ with the West” but would soon break the U.S. monopoly of stealth combat aircraft and achieve at least parity in air-to-air missiles.

Washington’s latest Nuclear Posture Review and other strategy papers point to China as well as capitalist Russia as the U.S.’s main enemies. Earlier, the administration rolled out a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” strategy that defined China as a hostile threat. This is consistent with Obama’s promised “pivot” to Asia, which was put on hold when the U.S. remained mired in the Near East. U.S. military jets and warships regularly menace Chinese forces and bases in the South China Sea, as Washington seeks to tighten the military encirclement of the country.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a further example of the continuity between Trump’s policy of containing China and that of Obama, despite differences over specifics. The TPP was Obama’s proposed trade pact with other Pacific Rim countries, notably Japan. Its

central purpose was to counteract Beijing’s economic influence. As part of his “America First” campaign, Trump ditched the pact soon after his election. The effect was to give China more leverage in the region. Japan then moved to reseal the TPP without the U.S.—and now the erratic Trump is talking about rejoining it. The pro-imperialist labor tops rail that the TPP fails to create the “strategic advantage over China.” We defend China’s right to carry out measures to protect and expand its economy. As part of our defense of China, we oppose the TPP, which also further opens up semicolonial countries to imperialist depredation.

Economic Advances of the Chinese Workers State

Contrary to the view propagated by many bourgeois ideologues and reformist leftists that China has become a new capitalist power, the Chinese economy operates in a way that is fundamentally different from capitalism. The CCP has over the past four decades introduced numerous market reforms and welcomed imperialist investment in certain areas. However, the strategic core of the economy—most heavy industry, mining, communications and, especially, banking—remains state-owned.

The CCP’s policies have also led to the cohering of an indigenous capitalist class. Many of these private capitalists (including in high-tech industries) have amassed great wealth, but they do not control the Chinese state, which constrains and ultimately controls their activities. Nevertheless, the policies pursued by the bureaucracy have greatly increased the threat of internal counterrevolution.

It is China’s collectivized economy that underpins the country’s huge economic advances. From 2007 to 2013, as the capitalist world was mired in the Great Recession, China tripled its output of goods and services. Ten years ago it accounted for less than 1 percent of global e-commerce; today its share is 42 percent, more than the U.S., Japan, Germany, France and Britain combined. In recent years, China has carried out gigantic infrastructure development projects including highways, airports and a vast network of high-speed trains. This was made possible because the Chinese government makes investment decisions based on what it considers to be in the interest of national economic development, not the capitalist profit motive. At the same time, these projects are built through bureaucratic mismanagement with its attendant effects, including shoddy construction and dangerous working conditions.

In the U.S., the capitalists are starving the educational system, as underscored by the recent teachers strikes and protests in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky and elsewhere. The bourgeoisie educates only those it needs in order to keep production for profit going. Meanwhile, China’s universities now graduate nearly ten times as many STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) students as the U.S.

The “unfair trade practices” that Trump, the Democrats and the labor tops denounce with regard to China actually typify the practices of the trusts and cartels that dominate modern capitalist industry,



Chinese workers manufacture micro optical lenses, Jiangsu Province, 2017. Chief target of U.S. tariffs is China’s rapidly growing high-tech industry.

“unfair competition.” They promote the lie that workers in the U.S. have a common “national interest” with the capitalist ruling class. But there is no such common interest. The union bureaucracy’s collaboration with the enemy class is the very opposite of what is needed: class struggle against the capitalists to reverse their rampage against workers and the oppressed. In fact, the labor tops have been active accomplices in this one-sided class war, selling givebacks, multi-tier wages and other “sacrifices” to defend the profitability and competitive edge of U.S. imperialism against its rivals.

In backing Trump’s tariffs (and those imposed by the previous Obama administration), the labor bureaucrats are serving as foot soldiers in the imperialist drive to restore capitalist rule in China. The 1949 Chinese Revolution, led by Mao Zedong’s peasant-based army, overthrew capitalist-landlord rule and established proletarian property forms, centrally collectivized ownership of the productive forces and economic planning. The Chinese Revolution was a huge victory for the world’s working people, even though the workers state that emerged was deformed from birth by the rule of a parasitic bureaucracy that excluded the working class from political power. The collectivized economy made it possible to free China from imperialist domination, lift hundreds of millions out of dire poverty and lay the basis for significant advances in industry.

The current moves toward an anti-China trade war are part of a broader counterrevolutionary offensive by the U.S. and other imperialist powers that also includes military threats and capitalist economic penetration. Just as workers in capitalist countries must defend their unions against the bosses despite the sell-out labor leadership, so they must stand for the unconditional military defense of

ing, it now produces three-quarters of the entire world supply thanks to a state-run drive to develop renewable energy technology. The White House then announced measures against steel and aluminum imports, which have now gone into effect. When initially proposed, these tariffs also hit many U.S. allies, but it quickly became clear that China was the main target, even though Chinese steel and aluminum imports are a fraction of what top exporters like Canada provide. While most capitalist countries (though not Japan or Russia) were given reprieves, the measures against China remained intact. Far more significant was the March 22 threat to impose tariffs on some \$50 billion in Chinese goods. When the CCP regime of Xi Jinping responded with equivalent tariffs on U.S. exports, chiefly agricultural products, the U.S. upped the ante by another \$100 billion.

Washington’s chief target is China’s rapidly growing high-tech communications



April 9: Joint U.S./Japanese naval exercises in East China Sea, part of imperialist provocations against China.

PARIS, April 10—Strike action by rail workers resumed this week with the second of two-day rolling strikes called by the four main French rail unions. Union leaders denounced the latest round of negotiations with the government as a “masquerade” and announced that they were ready to broaden their action. The *cheminots* (rail workers) have pledged to defeat President Emmanuel Macron’s plan to submit the state-owned rail company, SNCF, to competition beginning in 2019, a big step toward privatization, in accordance with a European Union (EU) directive. Macron’s attacks would put an end to rail workers’ *statut* (special status)—hard-won rights offering a level of job protection, decent retirement and pay.

This strike action is not only about defending rail workers. At meetings and protests across the country, angry rail workers rightly state that their battle is also to defend all public workers, whose contracts will be next in the firing line if the rail workers don’t prevail. They insist that theirs is a long-overdue fight to win back some dignity for their class following years of austerity, humiliation and daily abuse from the bosses and the capitalist government.

The Ligue trotskyste de France, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), has distributed a March 25 leaflet calling for “Victory to the Rail Workers Strike! No to the Destruction of the *Statut*!” at strike meetings and demonstrations. The leaflet explains that the rail workers should fight to extend the *statut* and unionization to all workers in the industry, including those in the many jobs that have been outsourced or placed on temporary-hire status—repair work, cleaning, catering, etc. These jobs are disproportionately held by immigrant workers, who are barred from employment in the public sector. No to the exclusion of foreign workers! Our perspective is for one industry, one union—with a class-struggle leadership!

Aiming to make French capitalism more competitive, the bourgeoisie has accelerated its war on the trade unions. The 2016 El Khomri law (instigated by “socialist” president François Hollande and his then economics minister Macron) and Macron’s “*ordonnances*” (government decrees) from six months ago target unions’ collective bargaining powers. The ex-banker Macron sees himself as the French Margaret Thatcher. He calculates that by prevailing over the rail unions, he can go on to strangle the trade-union movement for years to come, making job insecurity the rule for the working class as a whole—not just for its most oppressed layers. But for the past 30 years, the rail unions have played a cen-

whether under the guise of free trade or of protectionism. When the capitalist magnates hope to seize a bigger market share by selling cheaply abroad, they demand “free trade.” When they are undercut by competitors, they enlist the strong arm of the government to give them an edge with subsidies and trade barriers.

The world is dominated by a handful of imperialist powers, which seek to control natural resources, markets and sources of cheap labor, especially in the neocolonial countries. This leads to the relentless cycle of neocolonial wars as well as the ongoing efforts to restore capitalist rule to China and the other deformed workers states (Cuba, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea).

Historically, trade wars lead to shooting wars, the ultimate means for capitalist states to secure foreign markets and spheres of exploitation. Witness, for example, World War II in the Pacific. During the Great Depression in the 1930s, trade barriers were thrown up against Japan by the U.S., Britain and their allies. For their part, starting in 1931, the Japanese imperialists occupied Manchuria in northeast China and other regions. Interimperialist rivalries in East Asia came to a head in July 1941, when the U.S. and Britain cut off oil shipments to Japan. Having helped provoke Japan into war, Washington then ended it with one of the most coldblooded

France

Victory to the Rail Workers!



Sipa

Striking railway workers demonstrate in Paris, April 9.

tral role in the major class battles against the capitalists’ offensive. Their hard-fought struggles, supported by other sectors, paralyzed the country and brought about the defeat of the Jacques Chirac and Alain Juppé governments in 1986 and 1995.

Air France has also been hit by industrial action. After a years-long pay freeze, workers led by the pilots are demanding a 6 percent pay raise after the bosses granted themselves a major salary increase coming off bloated profit reports. Emboldened by the rail workers, other working people—in hospitals, schools, garbage collection and transport—are carrying out localized strike actions.

In another attack, the government in February pushed through a new law that will significantly bar university access to children of the working class. Increasing numbers of teaching staff are announc-

ing their refusal to collaborate with the new student selection process. Campus occupations by protesting students are being met by increasingly heavy police repression and a resurgence of attacks by fascists. In late March when students at Montpellier University occupied the law faculty, a band of armed masked fascists, in collaboration with the faculty’s dean, raided the amphitheater and assaulted students. In the weeks since, similar attacks and provocations have taken place in other cities. The fascists’ ultimate objective is the destruction of the organizations of the workers movement—from the trade unions to the left—and racial genocide. The task at hand is the mobilization of the working class, which has the social power and the collective organization to drive the fascists back into their holes.

The EU directive introducing compe-

ling bureaucratic caste must be ousted by a proletarian political revolution in order to preserve and extend the working-class property forms, institute workers democracy based on elected councils of the toiling masses, and pursue the struggle for socialism worldwide. The all-sided, egalitarian modernization of China hinges on the successful struggle for international proletarian revolution, not least in advanced capitalist countries like the U.S. and Japan. The establishment of a planned economy on an international scale will lay the basis for eliminating material scarcity through a vast increase in the global productive forces.

The labor bureaucrats who tie the U.S. workers to the class enemy through allegiance to the bosses’ parties (especially the Democrats) must be replaced by a class-struggle leadership. The workers’ fight must be consciously waged as an international one, based on an understanding that the interests of labor and capital can never be reconciled and that the historic gains resulting from the overthrow of capitalism in China and the other deformed workers states must be defended. The struggle for proletarian power in the U.S. requires the building of a revolutionary workers party. Our watchword is what Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels inscribed on their banner 170 years ago: “Workers of the world, unite!” ■

tion in passenger rail transport clearly demonstrates the nature of this reactionary bloc, which is designed to increase European imperialists’ competitiveness against their U.S. and Japanese rivals. The ICL has always opposed the EU and its euro currency, a financial instrument used by German and also French imperialism to plunder and subjugate the economically weaker member states. The EU and euro are also weapons against workers in the imperialist countries, wielded to destroy past gains and break the trade unions. ***Down with the EU and its directives! For a Socialist United States of Europe!***

For its part, the French union bureaucracy is pro-EU. Steeped in class collaboration, the union tops accept the need to make French capitalism more competitive, notably against its German rival, with chauvinist campaigns to “Produce in France.” The ICL fights to get rid of the EU by means of the class struggle. This perspective requires a proletarian leadership committed to revolutionary internationalism—i.e., a revolutionary multinational workers party.

Striking French rail workers need to build solidarity and collaboration with trade unions in other countries. The French rail bosses sought to use maintenance and engineering workers from the Leyton depot in East London to work at the Landy technicenter in Saint-Denis in France. In response, the British RMT rail union distributed a statement at the depot opposing the scab operation. The defeat of Macron at the hands of the rail strikers would weaken the anti-worker, anti-Greek, anti-Catalan EU. It would also embolden other workers facing similar assaults, including in Britain, where isolated rail strikes persist against privatized companies, run in some cases in partnership with French and German rail companies. In Germany, tens of thousands of public sector workers, including in transport and at airports, struck for a pay raise on April 10 after years of austerity and outsourcing.

As the French strikes continue, the capitalist state’s cops and courts, aided by the bosses’ media mouthpieces, will mobilize in even greater force to try and break the rail unions’ crucial fight. As the LTF wrote in its leaflet:

“While capitalism endures, any serious reform can be obtained only by relentless struggle by the working class, and is highly reversible as soon as the relationship of forces improves for the capitalists. It has been more than 100 years since capitalism entered into a period of decay, in which the productive forces have ceased to grow and have even rotted. The standard of living of the working class continues to deteriorate, while the objective conditions exist to create an egalitarian socialist society of abundance. But for that, there is only one way: to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism through socialist revolution and its international extension. To achieve this, as demonstrated by the Russian Revolution, what is necessary is a revolutionary leadership of the working class, a vanguard Leninist party. That is what we fight for.” ■

atrocities of modern times: the A-bombing of the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For Revolutionary Internationalism!

China’s economic growth has produced substantial gains for the population. However, decades of CCP market reforms have also generated an enormous increase in inequality. On average, China remains poor relative to the U.S. and other imperialist powers. This is especially the case in the countryside, where 200 million small peasant holdings averaging about an acre scarcely provide a livable income.

The CCP leaders falsely believe that they can turn China into a great world power—indeed, the global superpower of the 21st century—in the face of the imperialists’ more powerful military forces, advanced technology and labor productivity. This is an expression of the Stalinist dogma of building “socialism in one country,” which accompanies the CCP bureaucracy’s chimerical quest for “peaceful coexistence” with world imperialism. In reality, the current ratcheting up of protectionist measures demonstrates that the imperialists will seek to impede the development of China when they perceive it to be a threat to their military and economic supremacy.

Stalinist misrule has repeatedly undermined defense of the workers states. The

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Ants Among Elephants...
(continued from page 8)

In the city, one’s caste is less obvious. But by tradition everyone has the right to know, and if you lie, countless clues would give your caste away. In the universities, Dalit students are entering citadels of brahminism. In 2016 Rohith Vemula, a Dalit student at Hyderabad Central University, was hounded to death in a witchhunt spear-headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu-chauvinist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. Vemula’s suicide note said: “My birth is my fatal accident.” This February in Uttar Pradesh, a Dalit university student, Dileep Saroj, was beaten to death for having accidentally touched a caste Hindu. As Gidla put it: “Your life is your caste, your caste is your life.”

On average, every 15 minutes a crime is committed against Dalits, who have been facing increasing attacks since the BJP came to power in 2014. On April 2, Dalits staged an enormous bandh (shutdown protest) across India against a court ruling that weakens the Prevention of Atrocities Act, which ostensibly facilitates the prosecution of crimes committed against Dalits. Protesters were met with massive repression by the police, who killed at least twelve people, injured dozens and arrested thousands. While the legislation does little to protect Dalits from being murdered and maimed with impunity, the court ruling gives the green light to caste-chauvinist gangs for even more violent attacks. Indeed, upper-caste politicians and spokesmen have long been howling to repeal the law.

Stalinism: A Rotten Tradition on Caste

Sujatha Gidla’s uncle, K.G. Satyamurthy, who is a focus of Ants Among Elephants, was a college student when he was drawn to the Congress-led Quit India campaign against British rule. Quickly disillusioned with Congress, Satyamurthy decided to join the Communist Party of India. In so doing, he accepted the view that “one was supposed to think only in terms of class and not of caste. When the class struggle was won, discrimination based on caste would disappear.” With this rotten line, India’s Stalinist parties have tarnished the banner of communism on the question of caste, as they have on every other question of revolution. The deep caste chauvinism prevalent in society constitutes an enormous obstacle to forging the unity the working class needs in its struggles against capital. The struggle for socialist liberation in India requires the building of a Leninist vanguard party to lead the proletariat in the fight against the oppression of the Dalit masses.

Satyamurthy joined the CPI because—unusually for the Stalinists—the party joined a revolt of the oppressed in Telangana (which was then part of Andhra Pradesh). The Telangana struggle (1946-51) was an insurrection against the monstrous rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The Nizam’s rule was reinforced by the British, providing a textbook example of how colonial rule strengthened the



Dalits tied to car and publicly flogged by Hindu-chauvinist vigilantes in Gujarat, July 2016.

caste system. As Gidla writes: “There were systems of servitude in every part of India, but none was as ruthless as the vetti system in Telangana, the heartland of the Nizam’s kingdom of the Deccan.” Under the vetti system, “every untouchable family in the village had to give up their first male child as soon as he learned to talk and walk.” The child would become a slave in the household of the dora, the Nizam’s local agent. Similarly, all the women of the village were the property of the dora. Gidla notes that if the dora “called while they were eating they had to leave the food on their plates and come to his bed.”

The CPI in Andhra Pradesh became involved in the Telangana armed struggle and built a guerrilla army that soon controlled large areas of the countryside. In 1948, the ruling Congress Party under Jawaharlal Nehru dispatched the

members in Andhra Pradesh, including Satyamurthy and many veterans of the Telangana struggle. Both the CPI and CPI(M) drew a blood line against the Naxalites. In the 1970s, the CPI supported their ruthless suppression at the hands of Congress leader Indira Gandhi. In August 1971, CPI(M) cadre joined with Congress goons in a massacre of Naxalite suspects and sympathizers in Calcutta.

And when it came to crimes against Dalits, the CPI(M) during its decades in power in West Bengal mirrored the Indian ruling class. In 1979, the CPI(M)-led government massacred hundreds of Dalit Hindu refugees from Bangladesh who were living on the island of Marichjhapi. In 2007, in Nandigram, West Bengal, CPI(M) goons joined cops in a massacre of perhaps 100 people who were protesting against land-grabbing for capitalist enterprise.



Naxalite Congress, 2007. While Maoist Naxalites have traditionally drawn support from Dalits, they have not politically addressed question of untouchability.

army to Telangana. The Nizam had initially refused to bring his kingdom into the newly independent state of India, but quickly surrendered his “princely state” to the Indian army, which then turned to its main mission: crushing the Communist-led rebellion. Over the next three years the army massacred untold numbers of Muslims, peasants and tribal people. In the wake of the slaughter, the CPI reverted back to its historic role as an appendage of Congress, which had previously ordered that Communists be hanged from trees. Gidla bitterly notes that the CPI leadership “gave in to Nehru without even demanding amnesty for the ten thousand party members who were rotting in detention camps.”

Satyamurthy was devastated that the CPI abandoned the armed struggle and even more shocked to discover that the turn was sanctioned by Stalin. In 1964, the CPI split into pro-Soviet and pro-China wings. Satyamurthy sided with the pro-China faction that would become the CPI(M), hoping that the “Chinese path” would mean following the example of Mao, who had led a peasant army to victory. But the CPI(M) voted at its first conference to follow the parliamentary road.

When the CPI(M) became part of a capitalist government in West Bengal in 1967, a layer of party cadre split and launched an armed uprising in Naxalbari, becoming known as Naxalites. The split attracted a large portion of CPI(M)

In 1980, Satyamurthy cofounded the People’s War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh with Kondapalli Seetharamayya, a caste Hindu who was a veteran of the CPI and the Telangana uprising. The PWG, which became one of the best-known Naxalite groups—and the Naxalites in general—won significant support among Dalits, for whom the armed guerrillas offered a much-needed measure of protection against the brutal violence of the upper-caste landlords and the state. However, the Maoist program offers no way forward. The Maoists have no political program other than to look for “progressive” bourgeois allies, invariably sacrificing the interests of the poorest peasants to unity with “broader forces.” According to the Naxalites, Dalits must unite with the “intermediate” castes in a struggle against the “feudal” large landowners. In reality, the “intermediate” castes are often bitterly and violently hostile to Dalits and tribal people owning land.

While the Naxalites traditionally drew their support largely from Dalits (and today mainly from among the adivasi people), they have refused to politically address the question of untouchability. The issue exploded inside the PWG in 1984 when young Dalit party members complained to Satyamurthy of caste-chauvinist practices in the functioning of the party: comrades of the barber caste were assigned to shave other comrades; those from the washer caste to

wash clothes; Dalit members were told to sweep floors and clean lavatories. Satyamurthy, who had personally experienced caste chauvinism from his comrades, scheduled a Central Committee meeting to discuss the issue. The party leadership responded by having him “expelled on the spot for ‘conspiring to divide the party,’” as Gidla reports. In refusing to even discuss caste prejudice in its own ranks, the Maoist PWG was true to its political roots in the CPI.

M.N. Roy’s Distortions of Leninism

Ants Among Elephants brilliantly exposes the political bankruptcy of Indian would-be Marxists on the question of caste oppression. The task that genuine communists face is to outline a Bolshevik perspective for India. Marxists must address the daily oppression of Dalits and adivasi people up to and after the victory of socialist revolution. The ICL looks to the lessons of the first four congresses of the Communist International (CI). We seek to forge a party in India armed with a program of permanent revolution, the program that laid the basis for victory in the Bolshevik-led 1917 October Revolution. Under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolsheviks established the dictatorship of the proletariat with the support of the poorer peasantry and downtrodden ethnic minorities. The Soviet government issued far-reaching decrees, granting the right of self-determination to the oppressed nations, full legal equality for women and land to landless peasants.

In 1920, Lenin drafted a set of theses on the agrarian question, which could have been written for India today. As opposed to the Maoist strategy of peasant war divorced from the struggles of the working class, the theses stipulate that “there is no salvation for the working masses of the countryside except in alliance with the Communist proletariat.” The theses continued: “The industrial workers cannot accomplish their epoch-making mission of emancipating mankind from the yoke of capital and from wars if they confine themselves to their narrow craft, or trade interests, and smugly restrict themselves to attaining an improvement in their own conditions.”

The founder of the Communist Party in India, M.N. Roy, brought a distortion of Leninism to the subcontinent and put the nascent movement on a course of capitulation to bourgeois nationalism. As early as 1922, Roy drafted a manifesto for the bourgeois-nationalist Congress Party urging the organization to put itself at the head of the working-class and peasant masses. Under Roy’s guidance, the CPI set out from its founding in December 1925 to build a Peasants’ and Workers’ Party in Bengal. Rather than fighting to build a proletarian party that could lead the peasant masses, Roy sought to build a two-class party (i.e., a bourgeois party) where the interests of the working class would necessarily be subordinated to those of the petty-bourgeois peasantry.

Roy’s political program was contrary to the perspective outlined at the 1920 Second Congress of the CI, which Roy himself attended. Lenin insisted: “The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form” (“Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions,” 1920).

When the CI came under the bureaucratic leadership of the nationalist Stalinist bureaucracy, Roy acted as Stalin’s representative in China in 1927. On Stalin’s instructions, the Chinese Communist Party remained within the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang even as its leader, Chiang Kai-shek, staged a coup in April 1927 and disarmed and massacred tens of thousands of Communist-led workers in Shanghai (see “M.N. Roy, Nationalist Menshevik,” Spartacist [English-language edition] No. 62, Spring 2011). The slaughter in China was the bitter fruit of the

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In 1931, the British masters of “divide and rule” offered Ambedkar a separate electorate for the “depressed classes,” as they had granted to Muslims. This would have allowed Dalits, who are geographically dispersed, to form a single electoral bloc. Astutely recognizing that Ambedkar’s followers might unite with Muslims to form a counterweight to Congress, Gandhi declared a “fast to the death” against the British proposal. In opposition to Ambedkar, Gandhi proclaimed himself to be the leader of those he patronizingly labeled “harijans” (children of God). Though he

Following independence, the ruling Congress Party agreed to reserve seats in Parliament for “scheduled” tribes and castes and co-opted Ambedkar to draft the new constitution. In addition to banning untouchability, the written document promised many freedoms, including for women, but they remained largely



India's transition from preindustrial society did not lead to the dissolution of caste relations. The British colonial rulers—backed by the large landowners and nascent local bourgeoisie—preserved, manipulated and reinforced rural backwardness and the caste system. The post-

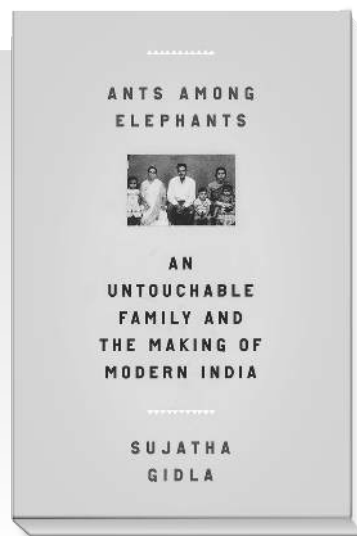
The flames that consumed a racially integrated group of over 80 men, women and children in Waco illuminate once again the basic truth that the capitalist state is the enemy of the working class and oppressed. As communists committed to the fight for socialist revolution to eradicate this oppressive capitalist system, we intend to sear the government bombings and mass murder of MOVE and the Branch Davidians into the memory of the working class. ■

To this day, Dalits who manage to buy land are often attacked by mobs, and the legal transfer of ownership is routinely bogged down in wrangles for years. The proportion of landless people in rural India has increased from 28 percent of the rural population in 1951 to nearly 55 percent in 2011. And it continues to rise.

Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* powerfully illustrates the central role caste oppression plays in Indian society. The liberation of the Dalit masses requires the forging of a revolutionary workers party dedicated to fighting all forms of oppression. In turn, Marxists committed to building such a party must fight to overcome the shameful legacy of Stalinism by planting the banner of the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution. This program is thoroughly internationalist, aiming for proletarian revolution not only in India and the rest of South Asia but also in the imperialist centers of North America, West Europe and Japan. The true Leninist party that we aim to build will be composed in its majority of Dalits as well as oppressed minorities. Winning the trust of the Dalits and *adivasi* people will require special demands and forms of organization. A Leninist-Trotskyist party in India, section of a reformed Fourth International, will open up the possibility of a way out of the endless cycles of brutal oppression, injustice and poverty. ■

In the wake of the botched Ruby Ridge operation, the ATF hoped to reap a publicity bonanza from a successful raid against the Branch Davidians. The capitalist state, which requires force to maintain its power over the population, brooks no challenge to its authority. A fanatical FBI commander in the miniseries captured this, pointing out that there are 5,000 people to every member of law enforcement: “You know how we keep order with those odds? Because they believe we’re more powerful than we are. We project strength and the

Liberation of Dalits: Key to Indian Workers Revolution *Ants Among Elephants*



Nancy Crampton

A Review

In modern India, with its gleaming IT centers and manufacturing hubs, there are widespread illusions that untouchability is a thing of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth. Untouchability is at the core of the caste system, which has been perpetuated and entrenched within every sphere of Indian capitalist society. Sujatha Gidla's 2017 book, *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*, shatters many of the myths that serve to make untouchability invisible. Her book is a sharply drawn picture of caste oppression and of her family's unending struggles against it. It is a compelling read and has been widely acclaimed by reviewers.

Untouchability is not simply a condition of poverty that can be overcome by education and social mobility. As Gidla matter-of-factly states: "I was born into a lower-middle-class family. My parents were college lecturers. I was born an untouchable." She uses the word "untouchable" rather than "Dalit" because it emphasizes the reality of what it means to be part of that population. Untouchability was formally abolished by the constitution of India, which gained its independence from Britain in 1947, and since that time much has changed in the country. But little has changed for the vast majority of India's 220 million Dalits, for whom freedom from the yoke of caste oppression is yet to come.

Ants Among Elephants is both a family memoir and a political history of the author's uncle, K.G. Satyamurthy (1931-2012), who became a famous leader of a Maoist guerrilla group. As such, the book shines a harsh spotlight on the atrocious record of India's Stalinist parties on the question of untouchability. The Communist Party of India (CPI) and its offshoot the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) reject the fight for proletarian independence, and thus the fight for socialist revolution. Instead, they subordinate the interests of the oppressed and exploited masses to an alliance with the national bourgeoisie. From its inception, the CPI has acted as an appendage of the Congress Party, which has always been permeated with brahminical (high-caste) Hindu nationalism. Both the CPI and CPI(M) have utterly refused to fight against caste oppression, falsely counterposing such a fight to the class struggle. This is the opposite of Leninism. We stand on the tradition of Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin, who insisted that the revolutionary workers party must champion the cause of all the oppressed in society, acting as the "tribune of the people."

Untouchability is a form of *special oppression* that is not simply reducible to class exploitation, though it overlaps with it. A classic example of special oppression is the subjugation of women, which is a key prop of capitalist rule; a working-class woman, for example, bears the double burden of her oppression as a woman and as a worker. India is permeated with myriad forms of oppression, including those based on religion, language, ethnicity and nationality. In heavily Muslim Kashmir, which is divided between India and Pakistan, the Indian army this month gunned down twelve people in one day.

For Marxists, addressing the oppression of Dalits is a matter of strategic impor-

"untouchables," who are forcibly segregated, socially and often physically, beneath all castes. As Gidla writes:

"The untouchables, whose special role—whose hereditary duty—is to labor in the fields of others or to do other work that Hindu society considers filthy, are not allowed to live in the village at all. They must live outside the boundaries of the village proper. They are not allowed to enter temples. Not allowed to come near sources of drinking water used by other castes. Not allowed to eat sitting next to a caste Hindu or to use the same utensils. There are thousands of other such restrictions and indignities that vary from place to place. Every day in an Indian newspaper you can read of an untouchable beaten or killed for wearing sandals, for riding a bicycle."



India Today

April 2, New Delhi: Dalit protesters stage enormous shutdown across India against court ruling weakening Prevention of Atrocities Act and giving green light to violent attacks by caste-chauvinist gangs.

Without a program for the liberation of Dalits, there will be no socialist revolution in India. Dalits are a central component of the working class. To date, there is *no* history or tradition of genuine Leninism as applied to caste oppression. As part of the struggle to forge a genuinely Leninist party in India, we Marxists of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) are committed to the fight to end the caste system and for the liberation of Dalits.

The Indignities of Caste Oppression

The age-old caste system is historically rooted in India's rural village economy. The wealthy upper castes dominate the lower castes and the countless subcastes, each one bowing their heads to those above and grinding the faces of those below. But none of these caste divisions is as fundamental, or as envenomed, as the chasm between caste and outcaste. A special place in hell is reserved for

In Gujarat last year, a Dalit man was thrashed by upper-caste thugs for "sporting a moustache." In late March, a Dalit youth was bludgeoned to death for owning and riding a horse.

Gidla's great-grandparents, tribal forest dwellers, were born in the late 1880s. They were not Hindus but worshipped their own deities. The family was driven out of its dwellings by the British colonial rulers in order to clear the forests for teak production. Her forebears worked an unused area of land and grew crops, only to be forced to pay revenue to the hated *zamindar* (landowner), who collected taxes on behalf of the British. The family was driven into debt and forced to surrender its land to the *zamindar*, and they became landless laborers. The enslavement of tribal people (the *adivasi*) continues to exist to this day.

Gidla's family converted to Christianity and Sujatha, the author, grew up in a Dalit slum in what was then part of the state of Andhra Pradesh, where being Christian is synonymous with being "untouchable."

Author Sujatha Gidla

She "knew no Christian who did not turn servile in the presence of a Hindu" and "knew no Hindu who did not look right through a Christian man standing in front of him as if he did not exist." It was only at the age of 15 that Gidla discovered, to her great shock, that there are Christian Brahmins—the Nambudiripad caste, which exists mainly in Kerala.

So entrenched is the caste system in the Indian subcontinent that it is practiced by virtually all religious groups in the region, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists. India's Muslims are in their vast majority regarded as "untouchable" and targeted for communal violence. This month, protests of outrage erupted over the torture, rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl, Asifa, from a nomadic Muslim family—a depraved and calculated act of terror by Hindu chauvinists in Kashmir. In Bangladesh, outcasts include the Rohingya, many of whom have been massacred in Myanmar. Pakistan's impoverished Christians, who face Muslim-chauvinist terror, including for "blasphemy," are also overwhelmingly deemed outcasts. Oppression based on caste is rife in Nepal as well as in Sri Lanka, where it is practiced by both Tamils and Sinhalese. Gidla, who lives in New York and works as a conductor in the subway system, points out that caste prejudice is rampant among Indians living in the U.S.

Gidla's grandparents were allowed to attend a school run by Christian missionaries. Education enabled them—and their children—to rise above the unspeakable poverty that afflicts the vast majority of Dalits. But the family could not escape the burden of their untouchability. The story of the author's mother, Manjula, a central character in the book, gives a sense of the oppression that Dalit women face: blatant caste and sex discrimination. Manjula and the other women in the family had to clean, cook and care for the extended family. Her older brother chose Manjula's husband, who beat her to appease his own mother. Overcoming these immense obstacles, Manjula acquired a postgraduate degree.

Gidla's family lived in the city and was thus spared the most heinous violence that is intrinsic to the caste system in the villages. Women are particularly targeted for sadistic crimes by upper-caste men who use rape as a means to humiliate both the woman and her caste. At the same time, inter-caste relationships are deadly dangerous. In February, a 20-year-old woman writhed in agony for hours before dying of poison that her father, assisted by the mother, forced down her throat. The father told the police that this was "just punishment for loving a man outside the community," i.e., a Dalit.

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For a Leninist Party to Fight Caste Oppression!