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RED STAR



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United Front

# CAPITALIST CRISIS ON THE HORIZON



**FORECLOSURE**

**FOR  
SALE**

**SOUP KITCHEN**



## About the Cover

Recent events indicate that another major capitalist crisis is on the horizon. While stock markets are at an all-time high and corporate profits are booming, working people still have not recovered from the Great Recession in 2008. As another global economic slowdown begins, many people are worried they will lose what little they have. Most Americans are already living paycheck-to-paycheck. However, these economic downturns also provided important opportunities to organize. They show the masses of people how the capitalist system is not in their interests.

*Red Star* is a revolutionary magazine published by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The magazine covers history and theory from political struggles past and present. *Red Star* also provides revolutionary analysis of current events around the world. It is part of an effort to spread revolutionary theory among the masses of this country and cut through the lies spread by the capitalist ruling class and their media. The people of this country and of the world have the power to make history, to move mountains, to topple oppressive governments, and to change the world.

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## Workers of the World Awaken!

Adapted from Joe Hill's *Union Song*

**Workers of the world, awaken!  
Break your chains. demand your rights.  
All the wealth you make is taken  
By exploiting parasites.  
Shall you kneel in deep submission  
From your cradles to your graves?  
Is the height of your ambition  
To be good and willing slaves?**

**Arise, ye prisoners of starvation!  
Fight for your own emancipation;  
Arise, ye slaves of every nation,  
It's time to take a stand.  
Our little ones for bread are crying,  
And millions are from hunger dying;  
The end the means is justifying,  
To liberate this land.**

**If the workers take a notion,  
They can stop all speeding trains;  
Every ship upon the ocean  
They can tie with mighty chains.  
Every wheel in the creation,  
Every mine and every mill,  
Fleets and armies of the nation,  
Will at their command stand still.**

**Join the struggle, fellow workers,  
Men and women, side by side;  
We will crush the capitalists,  
Like a sweeping, surging tide;  
For united we are standing,  
But divided we will fall;  
Let this be our understanding —  
“All for one and one for all.”**

**Workers of the world, awaken!  
Rise in all your splendid might;  
Take the wealth that you are making,  
It belongs to you by right.  
No one will for bread be crying,  
We'll have freedom, love and health.  
When the grand red flag is flying  
In the Workers' Commonwealth.**

## Capitalist Crisis on the Horizon



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# RUF Stops Another Eviction Attempt in West Oakland

by Zumbi



*Wood Street residents, RUF members, and local activists stand against the police and Oakland city workers to stop their efforts to evict the homeless from Wood Street.*

*RUF has spent around two years organizing in West Oakland homeless encampments. This work has helped to develop militant resistance to local police and real estate developers attempts to harass and displace homeless people. Through our efforts outside activists and groups have begun to get involved in the struggle at the West Oakland encampment. There have been some new victories, but these also bring with them new contradictions and challenges.*

The City of Oakland has launched a new series of attacks on the homeless. **Oakland has almost 10,000 homeless people and over 90 homeless encampments. These people are forced into utter poverty in some of the most desperate conditions of people in this country.** Over the past few months the city of Oakland, in collaboration with real estate developers, has ramped up evictions of larger encampments. This has been combined with a crackdown on people living in their cars and RVs. Through outright evictions at gunpoint, a series of new parking restrictions, and mass towings the City of Oakland has launched a coordinated assault on the homeless people in the City.

The Bay Area branch of RUF has worked to build resistance within encampments of homeless people in West Oakland. One such encampment is home to over a hundred people and was recently targeted for eviction by the city of Oakland. This encampment is located on an abandoned lot, between interstate 80 highway and Wood Street, an active big rig trucking line. **People have informally lived on Wood Street**

**for many years and the Oakland Police Department had an informal policy of directing vehicle dwellers there.** So as people were pushed from other encampments and streets throughout the area, they congregated at Wood Street.

On October 8th, the City sent representatives to “tag” all the vehicles on the lot. These tags are notices that the vehicles will be towed if not moved by a certain date. **The notices listed the vehicles as “abandoned or inoperable”, regardless of the vehicle’s condition.** This designation helped to provide the city with a legal cover for the fact that it was aiming to illegally tow and destroy a number of vehicles that served as people’s shelters.

**At that time there were over 130 vehicles on Wood Street and almost every single one was tagged for removal.** Residents were also told by the city employees that they were going to be asked to leave the same day their vehicles were scheduled to be towed.

Members of RUF made sure to be present at each scheduled eviction date. The city





*One of many community cookouts at Wood Street. These have been key in bringing folks together to talk about issues in the encampment and plan resistance.*

is aware, at least to some extent, of our organizing efforts at Wood Street. In October 2018 RUF members worked with residents of the encampment to stop a prior eviction attempt. In part due to this, and in part to create a general sense of uncertainty for the folks living at Wood Street, the city repeatedly rescheduled the eviction date.

**However, given RUF's well established links with the residents of the encampment, it was relatively easy to figure out the actual date and spread the word among the people living there.** We have been organizing in the area for over a year, not only to fight back against eviction and displacement, but also to build up solidarity in the encampments and between them. Most importantly we have been spreading revolutionary theory and ideas among the people. This has been important to clarifying a wide range of topics from the way in which capitalism creates homelessness, to the capitalist control of city politics, and even the need for revolution to ultimately resolve issues like homelessness and poverty.

**This organizing work has required prolonged and consistent effort.** Through group meetings at the encampment, one-on-one conversations with residents, and regular cookouts, we have been able to clarify a lot to the residents,

and build the basis for collective resistance.

We have also worked to develop links with activists and organizations outside the encampment to support the struggle there. This has included people from reformist social-democratic organizations, those disillusioned with the typical "left politics as usual" in the Bay Area, and even some ministers and members of religious communities. **Not all of these people are revolutionaries, but they are committed to helping in the struggle against homelessness and displacement.** In the lead up to the eviction date we coordinated with many of these folks to help in the effort to stop the

displacement of the Wood Street residents.

**In the weeks prior to the eviction, the city had been telling residents to move off of the lot and onto the curb outside the fence.** This was less safe as the street offers less space and residents are at risk of being hit by the trucks and cars that regularly speed down the road. What's more many residents have built up structures that cannot be easily transported to the curb.

However, some residents feared that disobeying city officials put them at risk of their shelters and belongings being seized and destroyed by the police. Many homeless people have experienced this time and time again in evictions. **It is very rare for there to be coordinated collective resistance to an eviction which is capable of stopping it.** Therefore, a number of residents had real doubts about our ability to work together to prevent the planned displacement.

In this atmosphere, many residents relocated to the curb the night before the eviction. **However about 15 folks living in vehicles some others in tents and informal structures remained.** On the actual day of the planned eviction, the city of Oakland marshaled police and other personnel in the area. This show of force included over 25 police vehicles, 50 personnel, and two towing companies.



The City of Oakland's stated plan was to clear the lot of vehicles (and implicitly the residents) so that it could be cleaned and paved. The City also claimed that it would be used as a safe parking lot to be made available to the previous residents of the Wood Street encampment. **In reality this plan was a smokescreen that served the interest of the capitalist who owns the lot. It is unclear if the City would even follow through with such a plan.** The U.S. and City governments have a long history of cheating people of their land by means of false promises and phony contracts. In order to get rights to return to the lot after its paving, residents had to give their name and information to the police. Some speculated that this was a ploy, and the police only wanted people's names so that they could target residents for retaliation.



*Swarms of police and city workers descended on Wood Street in an effort to evict the residents and destroy their belongings.*

*[The police] are not used to carrying out evictions in the face of united collective resistance.*

However, even if they did carry out the planned creation of a "safe parking lot," this would still not be in the residents' interest. The official plan was for the lot to offer parking spots to around 60 people, but over 100 people live in the Wood Street encampment. What's more the construction of the lot would take months, during which many Wood Street residents would have nowhere to go. **And, the lot itself would be a temporary program, meaning that people would only be able to park there for a limited amount of time.** If they did not find housing after a few months they would be evicted.

All of this shows that, even if the City

did really construct a "safe parking lot", residents at Wood Street who have lived at the encampment for years, would be getting a pretty bad deal in the process. **Therefore, it's in the interests of the residents for their community to remain intact and for them to not be pushed off a site that many have been inhabiting for years.**

While some residents were not clear about all of this, others were. **Therefore, when the City of Oakland tried to move towing equipment into the lot, activists rallied with residents and got between tow trucks and peoples vehicles. These collective actions caused the police to hesitate.** They are not used to carrying out evictions in the face of united collective resistance. Generally folks at encampments are not organized, and many non-profit "homelessness advocacy" groups actually collaborate closely with the City to ultimately aid in evictions. So, the police and city workers were not prepared to face dozens of people standing up to their eviction efforts.

**Instead of forcing people to move off the lot, the towing company instead removed the actually abandoned and burned out vehicles on the lot.** The burned out husks had accumulated on the lot over a period of years and were a sign of the level of neglect seen in



*After two days of protests the City of Oakland ran out of money for the eviction. Other than towing the burned wrecks, they only had enough funds to tow some vehicles to the edge of the lot.*

that area. After two days, the city had spent its budget on the use of the tow companies and had to conclude the operation; without completely clearing the lot. This was because they faced constant resistance and protest every time they tried to strong-arm residents into leaving the lot. So their entire eviction operation was slowed to a crawl, and they were only able to remove the burned out cars because they did not face resistance when doing so.

***The importance of consistent work among the masses of people in the encampment cannot be overstated.***

**Bringing outside activists and local neighbors into the struggle has been a key way to build resistance against the City government's plans.** Given the incredibly high levels of homelessness in the Bay Area, and the absurd rents that landlords are charging, many progressive people throughout the Bay Area want to get involved in the struggle against homelessness, evictions, and displacement. However, many of the existing groups that organize around the issue have limited success. In the case of non-profits and social workers, it is worse. **These people directly collaborate with the city**

**governments to displace and evict homeless people from encampments.** Much of this work is spun as progressive efforts to “create exits from homelessness” but it generally amounts to kicking people out of encampments and putting them into temporary housing programs like the “safe parking lots” or the Tuff Sheds. These lots and Tuff Sheds facilities generally have armed guards, are highly surveilled, and severely restrict the residents’ freedom of movement.

In a recent interview with a reporter, one resident of the Wood Street encampment said that he didn’t want to go to

the Tuff Sheds because he had already been to prison and didn’t want to go back. **He also described them as little better than a concentration camp.** These remarks sum up how a lot of the residents feel about these “exits from homelessness.”

**Given that the non-profits and social workers push the homeless into these terrible and oppressive living situations, many progressive people are disillusioned with these sorts of political organizations.** Therefore, there is a real basis to get many of these progressive people involved in our efforts to fight back against gentrification, homelessness, and evictions. We have already had a lot of success in doing so, and will continue to expand these efforts going forward. We are currently working to coordinate with other encampments in the area, and to link up with the student struggles as well.

The importance of consistent work among the masses of people in the encampment cannot be overstated. **None of this resistance would have been possible without the trust of the people built over many months of consistent conversations about the immediate situation and larger political topics.** The swell in outside support and the summing up of many months of experiences played a decisive role in recent work to disrupt the planned evictions of homeless people by the City of Oakland.★



# Boston University Students Protest Far-Right Talking Head Ben Shapiro

by Khalil



Hundreds gathered outside the BU Track & Tennis Center to protest Ben Shapiro's presence on campus.

*Students at Boston University were outraged after a far-right student group invited Ben Shapiro—a racist and homophobic propagandist—to speak on campus. RUF helped to lead student organizing on campus against Shapiro. We worked to expose the reactionary nature of the university itself and unite many students in the struggle. This has opened new doors for revolutionary student organizing at BU.*

RUF members at Boston University have been organizing to rebuild a radical student movement on campus, and in the process made a series of connections with other progressive students and organizations. Due to the relatively low level of class struggle and people's movements in this country, this has been an uphill battle. However, the invitation of Ben Shapiro by a far-right student organization, Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) sparked outrage on campus. RUF worked with other radical students to coordinate a series of protests against Shapiro's visit to BU, while simultaneously laying the foundations for a sustained radical student movement on campus.

## Ben Shapiro and the Rise of Far-Right Ideology

Ben Shapiro is a far-right propagandist and ideologue who has made a career espousing racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic

views. Shapiro tours college campuses in order to popularize far-right ideology, and uses sophistry to justify his reactionary worldview. Alt-right and fascist forces have tried to promote Shapiro's racist political views as typical of a "mainstream" conservative. **This is part of a concerted effort by far-right forces to legitimize outright racism as part of the "normal political discourse" in the U.S.**

Shapiro has been making openly bigoted statements since he began his career as a right-wing talking head. **Early on he wrote articles defending the slaughter of civilians in U.S. imperialist wars and he called for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from all of historic Palestine.** He has spewed a long list of racist, homophobic, and transphobic remarks. For example, Shapiro has stated that that all issues—like poverty and police brutality—that Black people face in this country are due to their "culture", he also also claimed that



*A few of Ben Shapiro's many racist comments.*

transgender people are “delusional,” and he recently even stated that if gay rights were taught in public schools he would “pick up the gun.” Shapiro has also called for doctors who perform abortions to be jailed and for all abortion—even in cases of rape and incest—to be banned.

Shapiro defends all this under the guise of “free speech.” In fact, it is hate speech which serves only to justify reactionary attacks against oppressed people, and deprive them of their own rights and basic humanity. **Shapiro’s efforts to defend his racist rhetoric under the guise of promoting “free speech” is shown to be a total farce by the simple fact that he has called for sedition laws to be put in place to crack down on anti-war protesters during the Iraq War.**

This exposes the logic of Shapiro and the far-right: They want freedom to spew racist rhetoric and to encourage violence against the oppressed but they want the government to crack down on the masses of people when the protest and rebel.

Shapiro is not so unique in this regard. Many of his statements and arguments reflect the ideology of the capitalist class that runs this country. **In particular, Shapiro and those like him represent the ideology of a subsection of the ruling elite who supportive of fascism and open white supremacy in lieu of liberal multiculturalism and “disguised” white**

**supremacy.** In the former, all dissent is met with violent suppression. In the later, we have some formal freedoms, but rampant police brutality and the robbery of poor Black communities by the banks during the Great Recession is overseen by a Black president. Neither the former (fascist capitalist rule) nor the later (capitalist democracy) are systems for the people; they are just two different ways the capitalist class can run the country.

**Increasingly blatant white nationalism and fascist politics is growing in popularity among a section of the ruling elite in this country.** This can be seen with the rise of the alt-right and Trump’s presidency. Shapiro, like many of these other “populist” fascists, is in fact openly funded by billionaires. His magazine, The Daily Wire, was initially funded by the Wilks brothers, who are billionaires in the petroleum and fracking industries. In addition, his podcasts feature advertisements from various major corporations every five minutes or so.

But besides simply being a corporate shill, Shapiro and other commentators like him (Tucker Carlson, Tomi Lahren, Laura Ingraham, etc.) play an important ideological role. **They are part of a larger effort to make fascist and white nationalist politics part of “acceptable” mainstream discourse and political debate.** Tours of college campuses and marketing their ideas towards young people are a big way the alt-right and other fascistic forces are working to lay the ground for mass support for fascist politics.

As a result, RUF members saw Shapiro’s visit as important to oppose for two critical reasons. First, the oppose the proliferation of fascist politics and unite a wide section of students in a struggle against openly hateful speech which would not only embolden racists on campus but would serve to normalize white supremacy and other reactionary politics in society overall. **Second, in uniting students in the struggle against Shapiro and the administration, to spark a more permanent student movement and set it off on a radical footing.**

## Organizing at BU

After learning of Shapiro’s planned visit, RUF members worked to build a united front of different student groups against Shapiro’s fascist hatemongering and his presence at BU. A petition was launched online, and we put out a call to progressive student groups as part of an effort to form a coalition and plan a campaign.

Because of the huge number of bigoted and inflammatory statements made by Shapiro, a general progressive attitude among the student body, and a wide, deep-seated mistrust and anger at the university felt by a large number of students, it was possible to bring a large number of different groups together. These included several feminist groups, LGBTQ groups, as well as pro-Palestine, anti-imperialist, and democratic socialist groups. Most of the groups were not revolutionary, and some people in the coalition even supported the Democratic Party. However, it was possible to unite with such a broad array of students due to the nature of the movement against hate speech and fascist politics.

The short-term goal of these efforts was to get Shapiro's talk canceled, and if that could not be achieved (which it was not), then the goal was to have a large protest and walkout from his event. The long-term goal was to revive the radical student movement at BU. **Boston University used to be known as "the Berkeley of the East" due to its radical student movement in the 60s and 70s.** However, repression by the administration and internal divisions crushed this movement in the 80s and 90s. **Given that a large number of students were outraged at the prospect of Shapiro coming to campus, our assessment was that it would be possible to reignite a long-term student movement on campus.** However, this would not happen automatically. It required serious dedicated effort and a series of struggles in the student movement.

We helped to form a student coalition, Students Against Hate Speech (SAHS), and planned a series of events in order to up the pressure on the university and raise the consciousness of the student body. **These included protests, tabling, and a public forum to discuss how Ben Shapiro's visit was symptomatic of much deeper problems at BU such as the role the university plays in the white supremacist capitalist power structure of this country.** All of this helped to solidify the coalition of existing groups, draw new people into

student  
union

Students Against Hate Speech / Activist  
Student Union

# WHY IT SUCKS TO BU

A TOWN HALL FOR BU  
STUDENTS BY BU STUDENTS  
NOV 7 • 6:30PM • SAR101

## A DISCUSSION ABOUT RACISM, SEXISM, AND OTHER ISSUES ON CAMPUS

TWITTER.COM/NOHATE  
FACEBOOK/NOHATEBU

*A flier for the townhall leading up to the Shapiro protest. Despite an overall culture of apathy, there is a general consensus among the BU student population that "it sucks to BU."*

the movement, and develop the basis for a sustained student movement after Shapiro's visit had passed.

Student outrage mounted after the school newspaper announced that BU had agreed to pay at least \$12,720 in "security fees" for Shapiro's talk. **Many students pointed out that when Angela Davis visited BU last Spring, the university forced her and her supporters to raise tens of thousands of dollars in funds to cover costs associated with her talk.** The petition against Shapiro quickly gathered over 2,000 signatures as students began to learn their tuition dollars were being used to hire at least 50 police officers to protect the fascist hate speech of Ben Shapiro. The open funding and platforming of Shapiro outraged a great number of students.



*A rally at BU in the leadup to Shapiro's talk. Organizing a series of demonstrations on campus in the weeks prior to the big protest was key to building mass support and getting new people involved in the movement.*

But this outrage did not immediately translate into action.

The first protest—a rally and march to the administration's office—was small, but got the attention of a wide number of students due to our efforts to flier and talk to a large number of passersby. The movement was also successful in getting media attention from student newspapers.

***RUF members emphasized that through principled political struggle, small movements can grow into large movements.***

Students Against Hate Speech organized a second protest that was held that weekend, with slightly larger numbers. **However, we realized that in order to really grow our movement we would need to be well coordinated in designing posters, spreading news, writing op-eds for the student paper, and talking to other students about the situation.** In group discussions, RUF members emphasized that through principled political struggle, small movements can grow into large movements. Despite the relatively small numbers, the spirit at the protests and among the

organizers was very high and strengthened our resolve to grow our struggle to an even wider scale.

The third protest marked a big advance in our work. **On a damp and chilly Monday afternoon, around 100 students gathered to protest the university's platforming of Ben Shapiro.** Many students who had previously not been involved in the movement spoke eloquently on the megaphone about how Shapiro's visit was typical of BU's complicity in racism, patriarchy, and other systems of oppression.

This rapid growth was in large part due to the efforts of the coalition to table and talk with students, put up posters all over campus, and spread the

word online in BU student groups. In the week before this protest, several articles were written not only in the student newspaper, but also in local city papers, including the Boston Globe. **The mood on campus shifted from apathetic to angry, as more and more progressive students came to realize that BU would not cancel Shapiro's event.** Even the Student Government, in no small part due to our efforts, passed a resolution condemning hate speech and the university's handling of the Shapiro event.

Rightists, reactionaries and fascists on campus followed us at all these events in order to spy on us from a distance. **However, this only provided more fuel to the fire as we were able to point out their reactionary politics and spinelessness to the students passing by and at the protests.** Open debates with the reactionaries at these events worked to expose their bigotry.

The fourth and final protest happened on November 13, the night of Shapiro's talk. At the peak there were 300-400 people protesting in front of the venue, including around 150 Black students who mobilized and created a new student group, Black BU, three days before the protest after learning the title of Shapiro's lecture: **"America Wasn't Built on Slavery, It Was Built on Freedom."**





*Thousands of BU students gathered in Marsh Plaza on October 15, 1969 as part of a nation-wide series of protests against the Vietnam War.*

The protest lasted for hours despite the below-freezing temperatures, which showed the dedication of those involved to stand against fascism and BU's role in popularizing reactionary politics. In addition to the protest outside, there were multiple disruptions in the event itself. Ten minutes into Shapiro's talk, more than 10 members of SAHS participated in a planned walk-out of the event while chanting against the bigotry that Shapiro was putting out.

*The seeds of a radical student movement have been planted; now we must water them and let them grow.*

During the remainder of Shapiro's talk there were other disruptions which SAHS did not organize. The protest and disruptions received a good deal of favorable coverage and was a major topic of discussion around campus in the days that followed.

However, the movement cannot simply end with protesting this one racist figure. The

seeds of a radical student movement have been planted; now we must water them and let them grow. This is essential to bringing more petty-bourgeois students and intellectuals into revolutionary politics, and encouraging them to join the struggles of the masses people. Students Against Hate Speech collectively grasped the need to continue working together, and agreed to form a long-term group on campus, the Student Activist Union.

For a long time, the student movement in the United States has been weak and disjointed. This is related to the dominance of various forms of liberal and nihilist ideology on campuses. Many students are primarily focused on getting a "good job" and having a "successful career." Others are critical of issues in society, but primarily see liberal solutions and minor reforms as the way to solve deep structural issues. Many students at BU and other universities around the country have a lot of illusions about the nature of the present system: it is all too common for students to believe that oppression can be overcome via the ballot box or that racism and sexism can be addressed simply with better representation in places of power.



*Students, workers, veterans, and Black revolutionaries all joined together to protest against the Vietnam War in Washington D.C. Around 500,000 people attended the protest. The red and blue flag of the National Liberation Front of Vietnam was flown throughout the protest. This demonstration shows what is possible when the radical student movement gets off campus and links up with other struggles in the wider society.*

All of this in itself is not surprising, especially on “elite” college campuses. **Universities in U.S. society are, in fact, training centers for capitalist imperialist ideology.** It is the duty of revolutionaries to struggle against both liberal reformist ideas as well as nihilism and apathy, and to expose the role that universities in U.S. imperialism.

*It is the duty of revolutionaries to struggle against both liberal reformist ideas as well as nihilism and apathy.*

The development of a radical student movement is essential to doing so. During the 1960s and 1970s, student movements in this country played a big role in opposing the Vietnam War and standing with the Black Liberation Struggle and the feminist movement. **Today, it is far too common for students to simply see the issues in the world in terms of social media discourse.** The isolation in our present society also encourages people to simply “like” and “share” on social media but not get involved in the day to day building of a movement. What’s more, the

university has established channels for “activists” to learn how to simply become good bureaucrats for non-profits and NGOs, instead of actually taking up struggle against systems of oppression.

Despite the successes of our organizing efforts at BU, these issues have not been overcome. **They are part of the larger dynamics and class relations in this country and need to be struggled against over a long period of time.** The student movement at BU is not isolated from society as a whole, and so the contradictions in society are naturally reflected within our organizations. Various forms of middle-class and liberal ideology will continue to reproduce themselves within the movement, and the ruling elite (including the University administration) will promote a whole series of dead ends and false solutions in their efforts to lead us astray.

These are real obstacles that will have to be struggled through and overcome if the movement is to continue to grow and advance. **While the movement that has come together already is impressive, the road ahead of us is long with lots of twists, turns, and potholes.** But with a principled political approach which avoids the dead-end politics of the Democratic Party, NGOs, and nihilism, major victories can be won, and a revolutionary student movement can be reborn. ★



# What is Fascism?

by Zumbi & Rodney



*Anti-fascist protesters march in Berkeley, CA to oppose Amber Cummings, the police, and the rise of fascist forces in the U.S.*

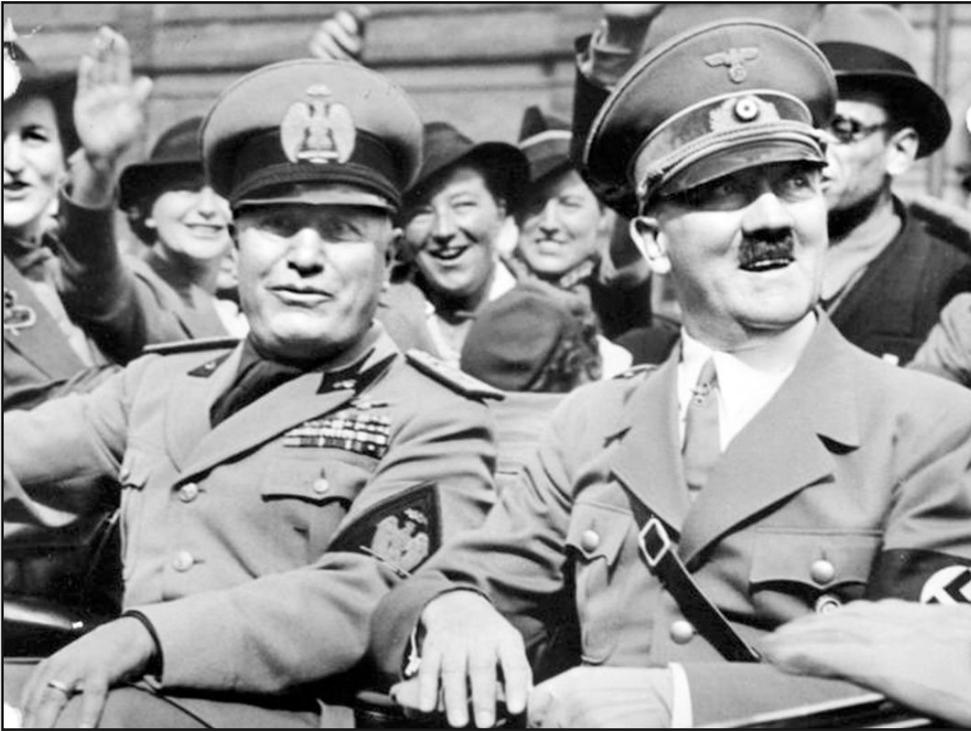
*In the Bay Area, RUF has organized and participated in demonstrations against fascist demagogues. In these struggles we have seen the importance of linking anti-fascist work to larger anti-imperialist efforts. We also found that there is a great deal of confusion about the nature of fascism itself. In this article we aim to clarify these topics to aid in the anti-fascist struggle.*

On September 1st, 2019 Amber Cummings, a known alt-right organizer planned a rally at UC Berkeley under the slogan of “Say No to Marxism.” This was the latest reactionary mobilization in Berkeley which aimed to attract white supremacists, ultra conservatives, and overtly fascist groups. **Working with several other organizations, the Bay Area chapter of RUF organized a counter protest to confront this reactionary group under the slogan “Fascism Out of Berkeley.”** Actions like these help working-class people and middle-class activists recognize the basis to oppose the ruling class, to put forth revolutionary politics, and to establish larger anti-fascist coalitions that show solidarity with anti-fascist struggles around the globe.

While the action was a success overall, there were also shortcomings that are worth mentioning. As the principal organizers of the event, we made serious efforts to involve as many individuals and organizations in this action as possible, many of which expressed different political ideas and including some very liberal

ones. This action gave the local RUF members vital experience with building larger coalitions and working with diverse, contradicting political tendencies. **In the course of this struggle, it became clear that there was confusion about what fascism is. Before, during, and after the rally fascism was discussed by many in loose, abstract ways.** This sort of confusion regarding the fundamental nature of fascism is a major problem for progressive and revolutionary forces in this country, especially at a time when fascism and far right forces are on the rise. If there is not clarity on the nature of fascism, it will be extremely difficult to build an anti-fascist movement that is a part of a larger movement against capitalism and imperialism.

**In response to these confusions in the wider anti-fascist movement we recognized there is a serious need to develop a concrete understanding of fascism.** Therefore, in this article we aim to answer a basic question: what is fascism? In order to clarify this, we define fascism, review fascism throughout history, and examine the current state of fascism



*Benito Mussolini (left) and Adolph Hitler (right). These two fascist leaders joined with Japan in the Anti-Comintern pact to crush communist and anti-colonial movements around the world.*

internationally and the need for solidarity with anti-fascist movements across the globe.

### **What is Fascism?**

When most people think of fascism, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy are often the first examples that come to mind. In the U.S., many people's understanding of fascism is based on popular depictions of these brutal regimes. **However, most of these popular depictions—especially Hollywood movies and TV shows—do not go beyond a surface level analysis.** In order to come to a deeper understanding of fascism, it is important to understand society in terms of social classes and consider the nature of the state.

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin pointed out that the state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. **Under capitalism our society is composed of an exploiting and exploited class where one class—the capitalist class—rules society through the oppression of another class (the working class) and, as Marx states, the capitalists establish “order” that creates the social and economic conditions to best serve their own capitalist interests.** This social and economic order is maintained and perpetuated by the state. It legalizes and increases the

oppression and exploitation experienced by the exploited classes by various means. Despite fundamentally serving the capitalist class, the state in capitalist society is presented as neutral, and in countries like the U.S., everyone is promised “their day in court.” Even in capitalist countries where there are such legal formalities, the overall nature of the state is to serve capitalist interests.

**Fascism is but one form of capitalist class rule where the conflict between the capitalists and the working-class is handled through the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary and chauvinistic elements of the ruling class.** A fascist regime's use of terror works

to criminalize any and all dissent of the people, even at the level of basic protests and strikes.

Fascist regimes are particularly hostile to revolutionaries and revolutionary politics as these regimes aim to ultimately strip the masses of their capacity to overthrow the capitalist class. Fascist state suppression can take the form of mass arrests, assassinations of revolutionaries, or outright genocide. **It is important to note that according to this basic understanding of fascism, the United States is not currently a fascist state. Capitalist class rule in the U.S. takes on another form: capitalist democracy.**

Under capitalist democracy, the ruling class allows the general population more freedom to organize, express opinions, and protest. There are so-called “free” elections held where pre-selected candidates—who all serve the interests of the capitalists—are voted for by an electorate that is generally misinformed by the media and education systems of run by the ruling class. **But while there are generally more partial freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and organization, it is important to be aware that these rights can be stripped away even if the dominant form of class rule is capitalist democracy as opposed to fascism.** Generally for oppressed nationalities and immigrants these rights are tenuous at best.





*During the Spanish Civil War communists and workers from all over the world traveled to Spain to fight against the fascists. They were part of the International Brigades which flew the three-colored flag on the right.*

As we will see later, the assassination of Fred Hampton and the Red Scare and McCarthyism are but a few examples of how a capitalist democracy like the U.S. still is fundamentally violently repressive. **It's important to understand that violent repression is an essential part of capitalist democracy. If people fail to grasp this, then they will fall into the trap of excusing the horrors of capitalism in the name of combating fascism.**

The primary thing to consider when determining if a state is a fascist one or a capitalist democracy is the dominant form in which the ruling class enacts its dictatorship over the working-class. **Regardless of which**

**form is employed, it is the people's task to seize the means of production from the ruling class and smash the existing state in order to liberate the masses by ending all forms of capitalist class rule.**

### **Fascism Throughout History**

The era of capitalism has seen many societies transform into fascist dictatorships, where blatant terrorism is used against the people as the normal form of maintaining the power of the capitalist class. Nations such as Germany, Italy and Spain were feudal/monarchical societies that had slowly begun to transition into modern capitalist states. These nations slowly assumed the form of capitalist

democracies, although they preserved many monarchical and feudal features. **However, as capitalist development increased in these nations, the contradictions between the working people and the ruling class were only heightened.** Big labor movements and revolutionary struggles shook these countries to their core.

The First World War and internal unrest pushed these countries to the brink of revolution. It was during these periods that the most reactionary sections of the ruling class came to power in order to preserve capitalist domination through the use of the most brutal methods to quell dissent and satisfy the imperialist ambitions of the



*Henry Ford receiving the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Nazi diplomats in 1938. Ford worked closely with Hitler and Nazi Germany to support their fascist policies.*

capitalist class of each nation. Japan is a unique example because it never assumed the form of a “liberal democracy” before transforming into an industrial fascist state. It instead developed a capitalist class within the old feudal ruling class that quickly adapted to modern industrial practices. In particular, the Japanese armed forces developed as the leading capitalist force in the country. **These militarists had a vested interest in imperialist expansion, which they aimed to justify by a fascist logic that Japanese people were genetically superior to all other people.**

*The western imperialists hope that after the Nazis fought the USSR, that they could swoop in and pick up the pieces.*

In the case of Italy, Germany, and Japan, these nations pursued an aggressive expansionist policy to seize territory and markets from rival imperialist powers. In a very short period of time, these fascist powers seized much territory that had either been directly controlled by other capitalist imperialists or at least was in their “sphere of influence.” For an

extended period of time the Western capitalist powers tried to placate the fascists in a bid to satisfy their own interests.

**For example, after the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1938, then-British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain called this brutal onslaught the price of “peace for our time.”** What he and other imperialists hoped is that the Nazis would eventually invade the Soviet Union and destroy the workers’ and peasants’ state that had been established there after the capitalist class had been overthrown in 1917.

The western imperialists hoped that after the Nazis fought the USSR, that they could swoop in and pick up the pieces. Contrary to most popular media narratives in this country, the U.S. actually did not enter the European theater to fight the Nazis until after it

was already clear that they were losing to the USSR. **The truth is that a big section of the U.S. ruling class wanted to side with the Nazis, and big capitalists like Henry Ford were even given awards by the Third Reich.** This shows that the difference between fascists and liberal capitalists is not so great.

The United States today is not a fascist country but a liberal capitalist democracy. **Under liberal democracy, the ruling class still employs brutal repression on working people. The U.S. has consistently repressed the people throughout its history, from deploying gangs of police to brutalize working people to massive surveillance campaigns against activists and the entire public.** The U.S. is a world leader at incarcerating the poor, with over 2 million people in prison in this country. Black, Latino, and Indigenous people are far more likely to be brutalized and incarcerated than white people in this country. The War on Drugs is many generations old and consists of a series of policies meant to destabilize working communities in order to limit their ability to organize and resist their daily oppression. All of these attacks happen as a normal part of the everyday functioning of capitalist democracy but do not represent the open, terrorist dictatorship of the ruling class.



However, as resistance and rebellion grows in the U.S., the masses will see the state attacks escalate. The Red Scare of the early 20th century are a prime example of such escalation. In the early 20th century there was a swell in labor organizing activity with massive strikes occurring all across the country. The U.S. government begin arresting thousands involved with union activity, citing possible communist ties of those arrested.

In West Virginia and Colorado, attempts to unionize and struggle against brutally oppressive working conditions took the shape of the "Coal Wars" a series of bloody conflicts between miners and mine companies. **The mine companies would work closely with private detectives (including the infamous Pinkertons) and local law enforcement to intimidate, harass, and even murder anyone trying to challenge to power that coal companies had over mining towns and the people working within them.** Around the same time, the government repeatedly and regularly violated its own laws on freedom of speech and assembly in attacks all kinds of progressive activism as the U.S. entered World War 1. It is important to differentiate between these periods in American history and other societies living under open terrorist dictatorship. America was still a capitalist democracy under McCarthyism and the Red Scare. **Capitalist democracy is just incredibly brutal and barbaric.**

It's also important to point out that for the most fascist sections of the ruling class, these methods of repression were seen as not brutal enough! This is clearly shown by the Wall Street Putsch of 1933. At this time there the most reactionary section of ruling class felt that the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Administration was making too many compromises with the working class.

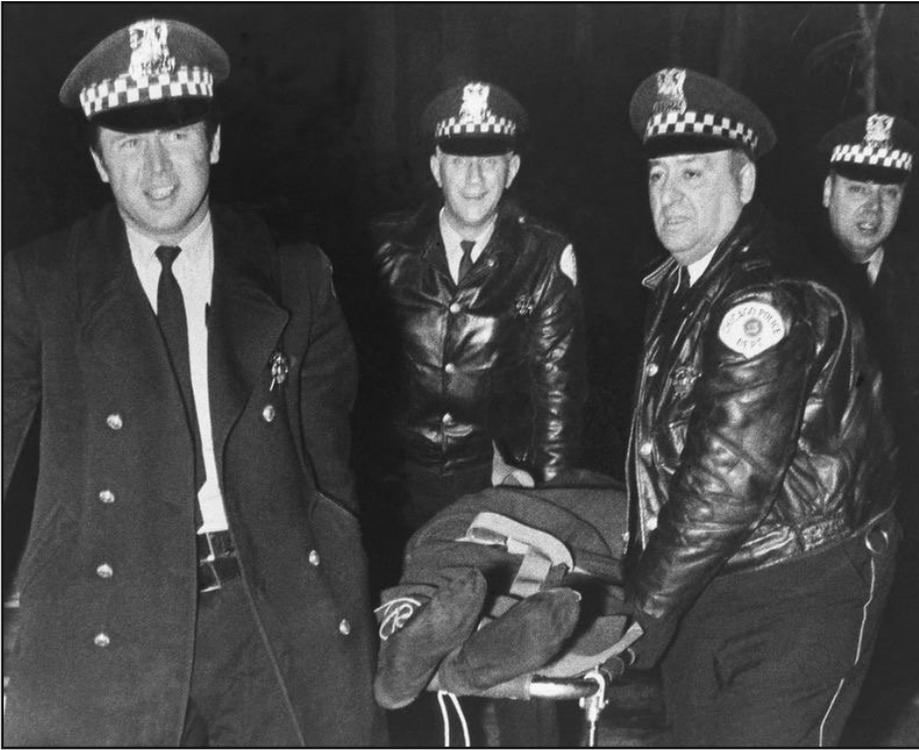
The New Deal drew from the profits of these capitalists in a state-sponsored effort to buy



*T.M. Cunningham (left) , M.S. Lane (middle), and Irene Du Pont (right) were three of the capitalists who plotted the 1933 fascist coup. Du Pont was the founder of the DuPont company which supplied the Nazis with chemical weapons for atrocities including the gas chambers at Auschwitz.*

off the working class and divert them away from revolution. **Capitalists at large corporations such as the Anaconda Mining Company, DuPont, Ford, and J.P Morgan got the idea that they could fund a fascist military takeover of the U.S. and hoped to hire disgruntled World War 1 veterans as a private military force.** These capitalists were so upset by having to give up some of their profits that they felt it made sense to lead a coup, and to align themselves with the Nazis. They also saw the growing anti-colonial and communist movements globally as a major threat to their bottom line. Their plot was uncovered and foiled but no consequences ever befell the conspirators.

**When the U.S. entered another period of more intense political upheaval in the 60s and 70s, the government created a massive surveillance infrastructure to monitor, intimidate, and assassinate revolutionaries.** One major aspect of this infrastructure was the FBI's CounterIntelligence Program, known as COINTELPRO. This program began in 1956 and was used to spy on the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, the New Left, Communist Groups, and the Black Panther Party.



*Chicago pigs smile as they carry Fred Hampton's corpse out of his apartment after they killed him in his sleep.*

One notable example of COINTELPRO's work was the assassination of Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton. **The ruling class feared that Hampton would become a beacon of nationwide resistance against the white supremacist capitalist system of the U.S.** Additionally, the state felt threatened by the Chicago Panthers' work to build alliances with radicals outside of the Black community and the FBI was worried that this could serve as an example to others to follow. The Federal Government worked closely with Chicago Police Department, who had a long grudge against Hampton. Together, they gunned Fred down while he was asleep in bed next to his pregnant fiancée.

While this attack, and others like it were particularly heinous it must be reiterated that this wasn't the main method of class rule deployed by the U.S. state at that time in history or since. Overall the U.S. ruling class prefers subtler methods of control such as propaganda and limited overt repression. **Richard Nixon called protests the "release valve of democracy."** In this sense, he clearly understood that allowing some forms of protest was essential to maintaining the status-quo.

**When the state turns outright fascist and suppresses all forms of dissent, the people's rage at the unjust system can quickly boil over into a revolution.** From this it becomes

clear that an essential aspect of capitalist democracy is the creation and promotion of political dead-ends for people to join in and protest around. This can be seen in the immense work done by the state to establish NGO's and Non-Profit Organizations as "acceptable" avenues of protest. This speaks to the ultimate goal of capitalist class rule; to perpetuate the class relations in our present society that lead the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer.

### **The U.S. and Fascism Abroad**

The U.S. generally supports a different form of class rule in its neocolonies than within its own borders. **The U.S. has no problem working with fascist forces abroad to advance its own interests. Likewise, it**

**generally employs a fascist form of rule when it invades and occupies another country.** U.S. imperialist dominance is built on the brutal oppression and exploitation of working people abroad. As this domination intensifies, anti-imperialist movements form to combat this exploitation. The capitalist class does not want to risk governments coming to power that are hostile to U.S. corporate interests. While such interventions are often justified by claims of spreading "freedom and democracy" around the world, the U.S. capitalist class actually have no problem toppling democratically elected leaders around the world to establish fascist dictatorships more suitable to the interests of the U.S. elite.

The overthrow of Chile's Salvador Allende is one of the most famous examples, but the U.S. has sponsored over 100 coups in South and Central America since World War II. **In the 1960s, the U.S. worked closely with far-right elements within the Chilean armed forces and even had many of them educated in U.S. military academies.** The U.S. also cultivated a class of neoliberal economists and functionaries known as the "Chicago Boys" (named this because they were educated at the University of Chicago) to serve as the new policy makers. After Allende was elected the U.S. worked to isolate the Chilean economy. All aid to Chile was cut off and no new economic aid agreements were permitted.

The U.S. funded media outlets and political “advocacy groups” inside Chile in order to foment unrest as the nation struggled beneath the economic pressure. Allende was not a revolutionary. He and his party opposed any sort of armed struggle against the ruling class Chile. **While Allende created some minor welfare programs for the poor, the U.S. government’s main concern was that he would lead Chile away from U.S. control and into the orbit of the imperialist Soviet Union.** On September 11th 1973, the Chilean armed forces—with support from the U.S. government—seized control of the Valparaíso sea port and then surrounded the Presidential Palace. The military then disconnected or destroyed radio stations and phone lines in order to isolate the government from the rest of the country and limit the public’s knowledge of how events transpired. Allende himself refused to surrender, the Presidential Palace was ultimately bombed, and Allende died during the chaos. It is not known definitively if he took his own life or if he was killed in the bombing.

The military quickly consolidated its rule with U.S. support and arrested thousands of opposition members. Thousands were also killed during the opening days of the coup. **The military and its Commander in Chief, Augusto Pinochet ruled Chile for 17 years and over 250,000 Chileans would be imprisoned during the dictatorship.**

The events in Chile are but one example of the U.S.’s modus operandi for handling resistance within the neocolonies. The U.S. has sponsored coups all around the world. **Similar polices of fascist repression and even outright genocide have been employed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and countless other countries around the world.** In all these instances, the U.S. worked to develop ties with broad coalitions of reactionaries forces. Including conservative-religious extremists and feudal interests in less



*Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (left) and U.S. President Donald Trump (right) share a moment at the 2019 G7 Summit. Modi is a member of an openly fascist party in India.*

economically developed nations. It’s also important to note that these neocolonies either remained outright fascist or slowly transformed into some form of neocolonial democracy. Regardless, the system of imperialist exploitation and capitalism remained. At present, some of the U.S.’s closest allies are outright fascists and the U.S. elite have worked tirelessly to court other fascist regimes.

On September 26th, 2019 Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to over 50,000 people in Houston Texas where he was joined by none other than Donald Trump. India’s alliance with the U.S. was first reignited by the Clinton Administration and the subsequent steps taken by consecutive administrations—especially the Obama administration—clearly highlight how close the two nations have become in recent years. **Modi is a member of the Bharatia Janata Party (BJP) an openly Hindu fascist political party.** When he was Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat he oversaw a pogrom of Muslims that left well over 1,000 dead and displaced around 200,000 people. Because a few Christians were also killed in this massacre, Modi was banned from the United States. However, as Modi rose to national prominence and as the U.S. developed a closer alliance with India, Obama overturned the ban and reconciled the U.S. with Modi and his fascist political party.

As competition between the U.S. and China heats up, the U.S. alliance with India has



*Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba was arrested in 2013 by a swarm of police and military officials. The Indian government claimed that he had been “waging war against the state,” but in reality his only crime was being a vocal critic of the government.*

become even more important for the capitalists of this country. Many companies are now moving production out of China and into India but this relationship goes deeper than new factories. **In 2008, the U.S. sold almost no weapons to India and as of 2018, the U.S. is the 2nd largest supplier of weapons to India (the largest seller being Russia) and U.S. generals hope to overtake Russia in the near future.** These ties reflect the importance of India in the U.S.’s larger strategic goals in the region and its growing economic importance. India sits at a very important crossroads between different markets for imports and exports of goods as well as conflict zones. The U.S. has been working to steer India away from other imperialist powers such as Russia or China in the hopes that India will eventually serve as a key ally against the U.S.’s rivals.

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi is a fascist. During his time in office, lynchings of Muslims have skyrocketed. The escalating hate crimes are also affecting the Dalit people in India. The Dalits—the so-called “untouchables”—are a section of society that occupy the lowest rung on the Hindu Caste system. **The targeting of religious and social minorities is a key aspects of Hindutva, the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Modi’s political party), which calls for the Hindus in India to do to the Muslims what the Nazis did to the Jews in Europe.** Modi’s government has already begun

this process by revoking the citizenship of around 2,000,000 Muslims in the state of Assam and placing Kashmir—the only Muslim-majority state in India—on lock down. Modi’s party’s openly fascist politics aim to blame poor Muslim, Dalit, and indigenous people for the economic problems that the people in India face. However, these problems are fundamentally a result of the class society in India and the plunder of India by foreign companies.

In India, intellectuals speaking out against the violent rhetoric and the fascist violence of the Indian state have been targeted, arrested, and even assassinated. **The**

**revolutionary scholar G.N Saibaba, who is almost 90% disabled was given a life sentence under colonial era sedition laws. These laws, which were once used by the British to suppress the anti-colonial struggle, are now being used by the modern Indian state to suppress any and all dissent.**

Saibaba was arrested by the previous administration, the Congress Party. This highlights the fascist nature of the Indian state itself, which is not reducible to a particular political party or any political figure. The systematic oppression and violent repression of minority groups has a long history in India and is not solely the result of any single political administration. It is engrained in the very nature of the Indian state itself.

Saibaba is one of many intellectuals arrested for working in solidarity with the oppressed people in India. Despite claims that India is the world’s largest democracy, this system of participation is limited at best and contrary to even liberal notions of democracy. Merely having some form of elections does not determine the character of class rule. **The Indian state’s open terrorist attacks on the masses of people is proof that the ritual of elections means very little.** What’s more, vote-buying and election rigging are the norm in India. So even this incredibly limited democratic freedom to cast a ballot once every few years (and pick from a pre-selected group of corporate-backed candidates) is little more than a right on paper.



For the U.S., it is vital that they have lackeys securely in power in other countries. **Alliances with fascists like Modi and the BJP are often quite advantageous to their corporate interests.** Not only do these fascists crush rebellion against imperialist plunder of their country, they also scapegoat the poor as well as religious and ethnic minorities. This diverts people's attention away from the imperialist plunder of India and provides a smokescreen behind which the U.S. capitalist class, and other imperialists can hide.

While fascism is not a principal danger in the U.S. at present, there is still a need to show solidarity with international anti-fascist struggles, especially when the fascists are armed and funded by the U.S. government. **Support for fascism abroad is a key aspect of U.S. foreign policy and for those of us here in this country there is a need to take a stand against U.S. imperialism and its fascist allies abroad.** Similarly to fascism, anti-fascism and imperialism are terms that are frequently used but in abstract ways. Therefore, there is a need to develop an understanding of what anti-fascism is and looks like and why anti-imperialism is a key aspect of anti-fascism in the U.S.

### **Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism**

Anti-fascism at its core is opposition to the open terrorist dictatorship of the capitalist class. Different sections of the population will oppose this for different reasons. Some will have illusions about the nature of capitalist democracy. These illusions are generally pretty strong among middle class activists. **However, for revolutionaries in the U.S. there is a need to have comradely struggle with those who oppose the excesses of fascism but not capitalist class rule itself.** There is still a basis to work with these people but there will be a constant struggle to ensure the character of the movement will be revolutionary and not some liberal project to “protect our democratic values,” which ultimately serves to justify and



*One of many sword-wielding fascist militias in India. Many of these forces are armed and sponsored by the government. Modi relied on these militias to carry out his 2002 pogrom in Gujarat.*

legitimize capitalist democracy and exploitation.

There is also a need for anti-fascist work in the U.S. to support anti-imperialist struggles around the world. Given the role that this country plays in arming and sponsoring fascist regimes globally, anti-fascist organizers must work to expose and oppose this. Otherwise the work can lead to a narrow focus on the U.S. without a broader understanding of the nature of fascism or of U.S. imperialism. **The struggle against fascism is not limited to the U.S. situation; it is part of the larger class struggle going on all around the world.**

The international working-class has a long history of anti-fascist activism. The struggles in China are a prominent example. Between 1937 and 1945 during the Sino-Japanese War, the United Front Against Japan was formed by the Chinese Communist Party. Its mission was to resist the Japanese imperialist invasion of greater Asia and the Pacific Rim during World War II. The Japanese waged a brutal campaign against the Chinese people. **The policy of the Japanese fascists was known as the “Three Alls”: Kill all, Burn all, Loot all.** The anti-fascist United Front was able to leverage the extreme contradictions between the Japanese Fascists and the masses of people in China and greater Asia. The United Front included the communists, the peasantry, and even capitalists



*Mao Zedong speaks to the Chinese people during the War of Resistance against Japan. The United Front policy of the Chinese Communists prepared the grounds for nationwide revolution.*

and feudal landlords who were opposed to the Japanese invasion. This struggle was a beacon for revolutionaries across the world. Revolutionaries today must look toward other similar struggles against fascism such as the movements in India and the Philippines and work to support and learn from these struggles.

**This United Front against fascism in China was not only able to defeat Japan but also created the basis for further revolutionary struggle.** The threat of the Japanese invasion created the basis for the United Front to work with even Chinese capitalists for a time. However as the situation developed and the Japanese were pushed out of mainland China, the capitalists tried to assume the dominant position within China.

**The revolutionary movement was able to consolidate the successes of the United Front Against Japan to unite the working class and the peasantry to defeat the Chinese capitalists and abolish feudalism.** This situation was further complicated as the U.S. government threw its weight behind the capitalists and tried to install a “friendly government” in China. The revolutionary movement was able to expose these maneuvers by the capitalists and the foreign imperialists and they were soundly defeated. The struggle of the Chinese Revolution therefore was a complex interlinking an anti-fascist united and anti-imperialist struggles, as well as opposition to feudalism and capitalism. All

of this brought the working class, peasantry, students, and revolutionary intellectuals together into a large revolutionary movement that was ultimately able to overthrow the oppressors and establish a socialist society. These efforts have very important lessons for us today.

## Conclusion

On September 1st RUF worked to build solidarity with international struggles against fascism. Members created banners with anti imperialist slogans and made many efforts to discuss the nature of fascism with participants in the run up to the march. However, the action was not able to put forth a clear anti-imperialist message and struggled to combat all the liberal ideas expressed by other organizations. This is not surprising given the present dominance of liberal ideas among many leftist

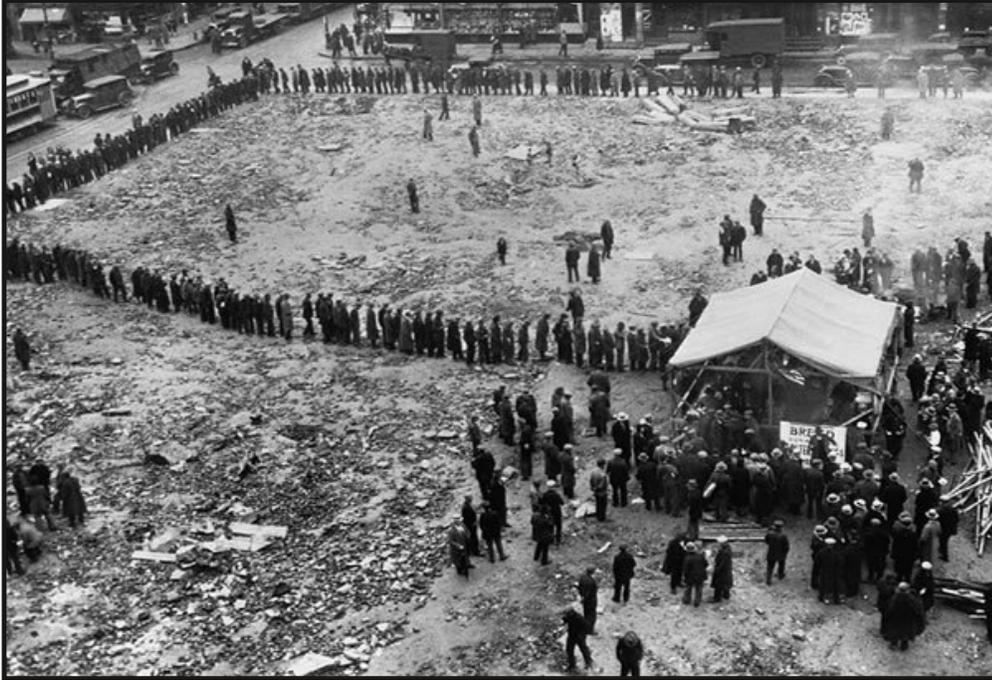
groups in this country. **The struggle to overcome these ideological shortcomings is a long-term process.**

The struggle against fascism takes a different form across the world. For many liberal democratic imperialist countries it is often a struggle to be internationalists. Activists within such countries must recognize the insidious role of capitalism and imperialism in the development of fascism. Additionally, activists must see the need to stand in solidarity with working people abroad and to form a larger coalitions against imperialism. **In linking up anti-fascist work to larger questions like the nature of capitalist imperialism and the role that the U.S. plays globally, it is possible to clarify to people the basis to go beyond a liberal opposition to fascism.** This is an step towards people adopting a revolutionary approach. It is a great thing that many people are willing to stand against fascists like Amber Cummings, but this by itself is not sufficient to upend the white supremacist capitalist power structure in this country and smash the basis for fascism. Only through revolution is this possible. Building up a larger anti-fascist front to combat the rise of far-right forces in this country is an important part of developing the revolutionary movement.★

**Death to Fascism!**

# Capitalist Crises: Symptoms of a Sick Economic System

by Nadia & Katya



*A bread line during the Great Depression. People all over the country had to wait in lines like these for hours just to get food.*

*In 2008 the global financial crisis devastated millions of lives and kicked off a major recession. Governments around the world responded by printing money and bailing out the capitalists who had caused the crisis while working people lost their homes and savings. Today we are on the brink of another economic crisis, so it's important to grasp why these crisis happen in the first place and how to organize during them.*

We're constantly told that capitalism is the best, most efficient, most stable, and most just of all economic systems. But if we look at the history of capitalism we see that this is clearly not the case. **Capitalism has led to big advances in our ability to produce goods, but it has also created huge numbers of poor people and has spawned two disastrous world wars which killed tens of millions of people.** It is also based fundamentally on the exploitation of the vast majority of people by a tiny minority of ultra-rich capitalists.

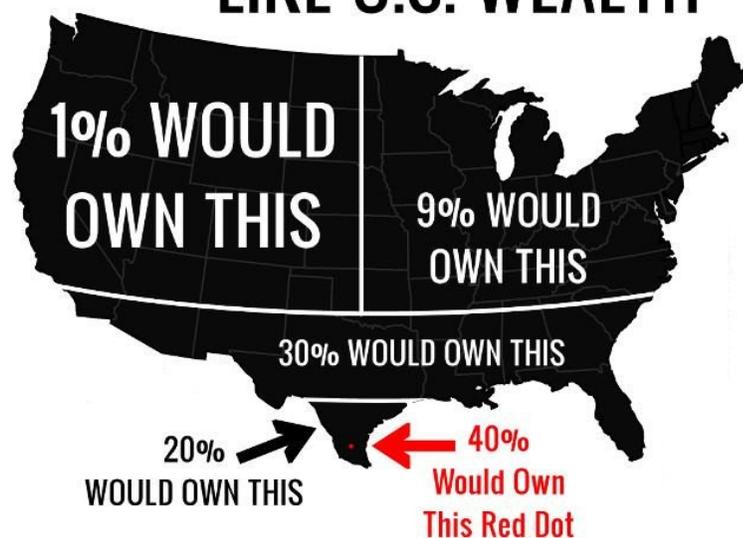
Another huge problem with capitalism is that it is very unstable. Capitalist economic crises happen pretty frequently. Sometimes they are major, worldwide disasters like the Great Depression or the 2008 financial crisis, and sometimes they are less severe, and contained to one country or to one region. Politicians, economists, and bankers often discuss these crises as if they are random "acts of god," or say that they happen because of mistakes or mismanagement. **But these economic crises are actually an inevitable result of the capitalist**

**system of production.** They will continue to happen as long as we live in a capitalist society, and these crises will continue to hurt poor and working people the most.

These crises clearly show that the myths that we are told about capitalism are actually lies which are spread to disguise the brutal reality of this system. Even when capitalism is "working normally," and is not in a period of acute crisis, the daily reality of living under capitalism is brutal and desperate for the vast majority of people. **Currently in the U.S., 66% of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck, and are unable to afford an unexpected \$500 expense.** Many cities around the country are experiencing massive increases in homelessness as rents become too expensive for people to afford.

Meanwhile, the amount of wealth owned by the richest people in the U.S. has massively expanded over the past century. **On the one hand, we have a small number of billionaires and millionaires who live incredibly decadent lives of luxury and consumption.** On the other

## IF U.S. LAND WERE DIVIDED LIKE U.S. WEALTH



*A graphical representation of wealth inequality in the U.S. as of 2011. Since then things have only gotten worse. This is the inevitable result of the capitalist system.*

hand we have, all around the world, billions of people who live in abject poverty.

**This is the pain and misery of the capitalist system under its normal operation, and during times of crisis it only gets worse.** When capitalist crises like the Great Depression or the 2008 crash happen it is poor and oppressed people who suffer the most. Many lose their homes and their savings, and have to struggle day to day just to get enough food to eat.

***Capitalism is unique because even when more than enough food is produced to feed everyone there are still economic crashes which result in large numbers of people going hungry.***

During the Great Depression of the 1930's, many people in the U.S. lost their jobs and had to scrounge whatever they could to survive. The U.S. government's official unemployment numbers (which are misleading underestimates) reached 25%, meaning that tens of millions of people had no job and no income. **Many of these people had to eat weeds and garbage to survive, and lived with constant aching hunger every day.** A whole generation of children grew up malnourished, leaving them

with life-long health effects.

The great scandal of the capitalist system was that this enormous economic crisis, which left millions of people hungry, wasn't caused by a shortage of food. In fact, at the time more than enough food was produced to feed all the hungry people in the U.S. But under the capitalist system it was impossible for them to get enough to eat for a simple reason: they didn't have enough money to buy it.

The capitalists who owned the food preferred to destroy the food than give it away for free, despite the fact that so many were going hungry. **Because of this, huge amounts of food were destroyed or left to rot during the Great Depression.**

This is one of the ways that capitalism is different than earlier forms of production. **Earlier forms of production also experienced periodic crises, and these were also very painful periods for the people.** Under feudalism in Europe, for example, there were sometimes crop failures, which could leave thousands unable to feed themselves after they paid rent to the landlord. Often in these situations people rebelled, refusing to pay rent or even overthrowing the landlords.

However, capitalism is unique because even when more than enough food is produced to feed everyone there are still economic crashes which result in large numbers of people going hungry. These crises

don't have to do with crop failures or difficulties in production.

**Instead, they are rooted in a fundamental problem with the capitalist system which cannot possibly be resolved without getting rid of capitalism.** This is why it's so essential for the people to get organized all around the world, so they can overthrow the exploitative and oppressive capitalist system and replace it with an economic system that serves the people.

This fact is one that the capitalists try desperately to hide. They will blame economic recessions on anyone and anything other than capitalism: the weather, Russian agents, mistaken policies, etc. They will often even blame the working class for these problems, saying that working people are lazy, or that they don't spend enough of their money on consumer goods. But the fact that capitalist crises continue to happen, and the fact that they have not shown any sign of going away, shows us that these explanations are lies meant to distract from the destructive reality of capitalism.

**The 2008 crisis and its aftermath clearly showed how these economic crises are a result of core problems with capitalism.** In the immediate wake of the 2008 crisis, governments and banks

around the world rolled out a series of policies and programs to “deal with” the crisis. In many countries these policies have created the appearance of economic growth and a “recovery” from the crisis, but the reality is that the underlying problems are still present. Moreover, this so-called “recovery” was only possible through a lot of superficial methods—like “printing” electronic money and giving it to the banks—which temporarily masked the crisis and kicked the can down the road for a few years.

Recently, a number of economic indicators have shown that we are likely facing a resurgence of these economic problems in the near future. Over the past decade, debt around the world has grown to insane levels. A number of central banks have been printing money hand over fist in desperate attempts to keep stock prices rising. **The central bank of Japan has, in an unprecedented maneuver, started directly buying tons of stocks of Japanese corporations, hoping to artificially inflate stock prices by reducing the supply.** All of these measures have not fundamentally addressed the problems that surfaced in 2008, and have instead simply masked them.

Right now we are quickly approaching a situation where these measures will stop working, and the problems that surfaced in 2008 will come



*As the 2008 financial crisis intensified, both the Democrats and Republicans worked together to bailout the banks by stealing money from working people in the form of new taxes and printing money.*

back more severely than before. **A serious economic crisis is a real disaster for the people, but it also provides a lot of openings for people to get organized and fight for their interests.** In order to be ready to take advantage of these openings, we need to study what happened in 2008, understand what's been going on since then, and learn about the connection between economic crises and the fundamental relations of exploitation under capitalism.

### **2008 and the Recovery without a Recovery**

The 2008 financial crash was one of the worst in a long time, and probably the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Many people lost their homes, their jobs, and their savings. Dozens of countries went into recessions. **Reactionary governments around the world, like the U.S. government, took drastic measures to “save the economy,” generally by giving huge gifts to the very people whose speculation and profiteering caused the crisis.**

The crisis was set off by the fundamental problem of overproduction in the capitalist system. Essentially, all across the U.S. there was—and in fact still is—a massive surplus of homes. Just before the financial crisis there were, according to



*During and after the 2008 crisis there was a big effort by the ruling class and their media talking-heads to blame the poor for the recession. This was aimed at distracting people from the underlying problems in the capitalist system.*

official statistics, just under 18 million vacant homes in the U.S. **Right now we have around 17 million extra homes sitting vacant – a very similar situation.** Even in 2008 contractors and construction companies were still building new homes, despite the fact that unsold homes were starting to pile up.

This surplus of vacant homes began to reach huge levels in the early 2000s, when home prices hit record highs. The capitalists who owned these homes needed to find a way to start selling them so that they could keep making money. Together with big banks, they came up with a solution: sub-prime mortgages. **Basically they changed some of the requirements for getting a mortgage so that people who weren't actually able to pay off the mortgage could qualify. Then they pressured a whole lot of people into getting these mortgages using the ideology of the "American Dream," advertising, and some fast-talking con-artists who worked for the banks.**

This initially worked out great for the capitalists who owned the homes and for the banks. **The capitalists were able to sell the homes, and because they got paid as soon as the loan was approved they didn't care if it was going to be paid off or not.** And as for the banks who created the mortgages, they too didn't care what happened with the loan, because as soon as the ink was dry on the contract they would turn around and sell the mortgage to a different financial entity. The problem arose with what happened to these

mortgages after they were sold. **These mortgages would get bundled up with thousands of other mortgages into a big package, and investment banks would then sell the rights to a portion of the mortgage payments made on all the mortgages.** This bundling process is called *securitization*, and the shares that the banks then sold are called *mortgage-backed securities*.

The idea behind this was that if enough mortgages were bundled together it wouldn't matter much if one or two of them defaulted, because there would be enough other mortgages that didn't default that it would all sort of work out in the end. Enough payments would still be flowing in that the securities would still be worth something. This, at least, was what the organizations

making and selling the securities were claiming. **But, of course, they were lying about how many subprime mortgages were in the mix, and they were lying about how likely those mortgages were to end up in default.**

In the end these mortgage-backed securities ended up setting off the financial crisis because growing numbers of defaults showed that they were essentially worthless. But before that happened they had become a hot commodity, and a huge number of banks and other financial institutions were buying and selling them and using them in all sorts of transactions. **This reflected a real decadence in the system: a lot of financial institutions were frantically searching for new profitable investments, so when the new mortgage-backed securities came along they gobbled them up.** So then when it came out that these securities were worthless, it rapidly led to severe crisis where all sorts of ongoing financial maneuvers essentially had the rug pulled out from under them.

Although the mortgage-backed securities ended up being the thing that set off the financial crisis, the crisis itself was the result of a much deeper problem. There is massive overproduction in a whole bunch of different sectors of the economy, not just in housing. **So while it happened to be the housing market that set off the crisis in 2008, the crisis could have been set off by any number of other things.** It's a problem with the fundamental structure of the capitalist economy, not just with this or that particular industry.

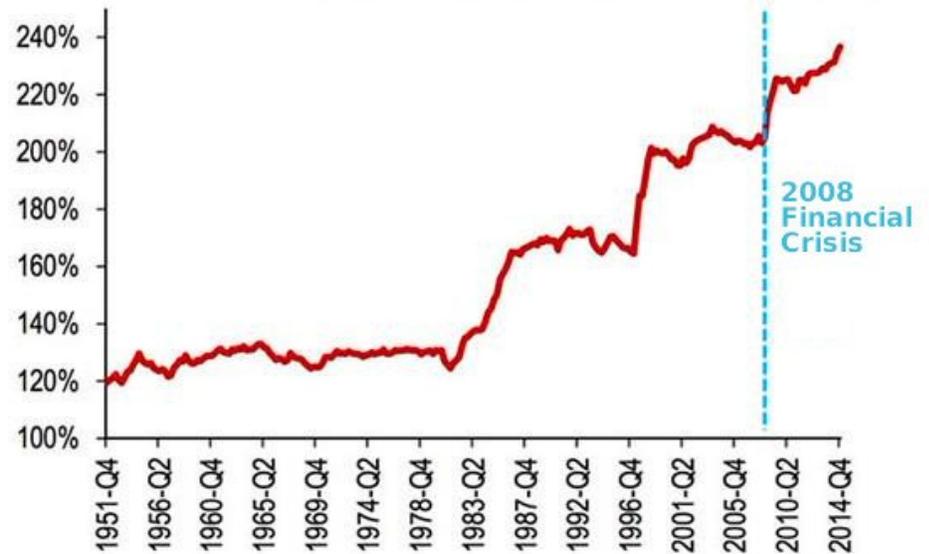
Since the 2008 crisis, governments around the world have tried to deal with the underlying economic problems that were exposed. But the problem that they face is that the underlying issues which caused the crisis cannot possibly be resolved under capitalism. **The problem in question, overproduction, exists as a result of the most fundamental and basic economic relations of the capitalist system. For this reason it cannot be addressed without getting rid of capitalism.**

Of course, for reactionary capitalist governments, getting rid of capitalism is clearly off the table. Governments around the world are run by and for the capitalist class, so any “solution” they have for an economic crisis like 2008 is going to be one which is compatible with capitalism. **And given that the problem in question can't be resolved without getting rid of capitalism, the solutions that they come up with are inevitably some type of non-solution.** Generally they settle for temporarily masking the problem and putting it off for the future.

For instance, a lot of the post-2008 economic growth has been driven by a massive expansion of debt. **This debt, which is essentially “borrowing from the future,” creates a bigger headache down the road, even if it appears to temporarily solve a problem.** Since 2008 in the U.S. there has been a massive expansion of debt, with a lot of people racking up credit card debt, city and town governments taking out loan after loan, and a huge growth in the number of student loans.

This has happened because of the fundamental underlying problem of overproduction, which we explain more fully below. **In short, under capitalism more goods are produced than the working class is able to buy.** This is a major problem that leads to the periodic economic crises that afflict capitalist economies, since tons and tons of goods are produced which cannot be profitably sold to the impoverished working class. The creation of debt,

**Chart 3: Evolution of global debt to GDP. No post-crisis deleveraging**



*The ratio of global debt to GDP, showing massive growth of debt historical and huge spike after 2008. Governments and corporations around the world have borrowed from the future to stave off the crisis.*

and especially consumer debt like credit cards, mortgages, and auto loans, is a way to temporarily mask the problem by increasing the purchasing power of the working class.

**The basic problem with fueling economic growth using debt is that there is a limit to how much debt can be paid back.** People need to pay for basic essentials: rent, food, clothing, transportation, etc. If their debt payments increase too much, to the point where they can no longer afford these basic things, they will be unable to keep paying off the debt. When this happens people will start defaulting on their loans and going bankrupt because they're faced with a choice between eating and making a credit card or mortgage payment.

When this happens in a big way, as it did in 2008, it exposes that a whole house of cards has been built on top of debt. Each financial entity which is involved in creating debt is counting on payments coming in, to pay off debt of their own, to pay for their day-to-day operations, and to make profit. Moreover, a ton of stores like Wal-Mart, Macy's, Amazon, and Best Buy are counting on people to charge things to their credit cards so that they can turn a profit. **This means that when a lot of people are unable to pay off their debts it can set off a crisis where a whole series of different companies suddenly go out of business.** This is one of the ways that the fundamental problem of overproduction rears its head.

Since 2008 there has been a huge increase in debt around the world. **In the U.S., a big part of this has been increases in government debt, but consumer debt—meaning debt owed by people on car loans, mortgages, credit cards, and so on—has also expanded a lot.** Following the 2008 crash consumer debt levels declined for a few years, but in 2013 they started climbing again. This increase in debt has been a key driving force behind economic growth in the past few years, but right now there are serious signs that this is reaching its limits. **Debt levels are getting to a point where people can't keep up with payments anymore, and rates of defaults are climbing.**

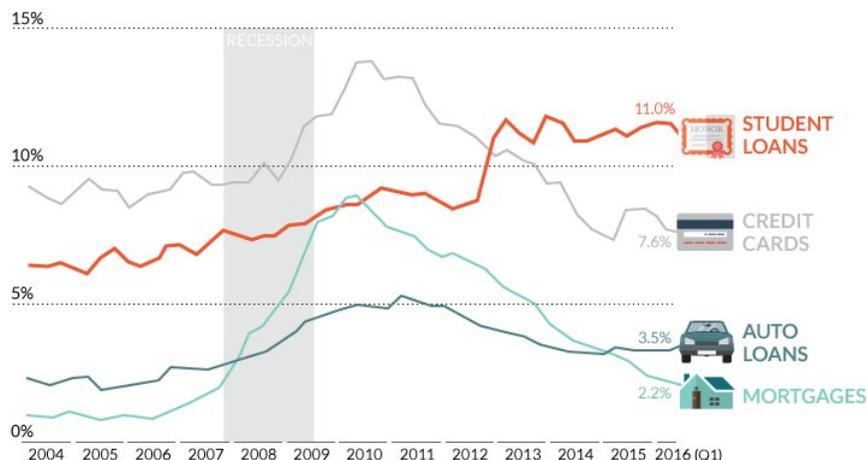
Student loans are a good example of this. In 2008 the total student loan debt in the whole U.S.—meaning the total amount owed on all existing student loans—was around half a trillion dollars. **In 2019, around 12 years later, it has almost tripled, to around \$1.46 trillion dollars.** The amount that individual people are borrowing has also increased, averaging \$37,000 in 2016, a 78% increase from 10 years earlier. From 2005 to 2016 the average monthly payment on student loans nearly doubled, increasing from \$227 to \$393. Since people's wages have been essentially flat during the same period, a lot of people haven't been able to keep up with payments, and they're simply not paying their loans. **44.5 million Americans have student loan debt, and currently around 10,000,000 of those people are not making any payments on their loans.**

Of these 10 million, right now 3.3 million people are deferring their students loans, meaning they are not paying them off because they meet certain requirements, like being in school. 2.6 million people's loans are in forbearance, which means that they haven't been making payments but they haven't yet defaulted. And 4.7 million people are in default, meaning that they haven't made any

## STUDENT LOAN DELINQUENCIES ARE SKY HIGH

Simple arithmetic shows that one of these loans is not like the other

% of Balance 90+ Days Delinquent



Not the Big Man on Campus (Q1 2016)

Even though student loans are approaching a total of **\$1.3 trillion**, they still make up a relatively small portion of U.S. consumer debt compared to mortgages.

\$0.71T



CREDIT CARDS

\$1.07T



AUTO LOANS

\$1.26T



STUDENT LOANS

\$8.37T



MORTGAGES

*Unlike other forms of household debt the delinquency rate on student loans has only continued to increase since the 2008 crisis. Since this chart was published in 2016, delinquency rates on other forms of debt have also increased.*

payment on their loans for more than a year. **Altogether, this means that around 23% of the student loans that exist are not being paid at all.** The situation is similar for car loans. After the 2008 financial crisis the amount of car loans initially dropped rapidly, falling from a high of \$0.8 trillion in 2008 to \$0.7 trillion in 2009. Since then it has expanded significantly, hitting a high in 2019 of \$1.3 trillion. And similar to student loans, a growing percentage of auto loans are not being paid at all. The current percentage of car loans in delinquency—meaning that they have not been paid for more than 90 days—is around 4.6%. **This means that right now in the U.S. one out of every twenty people with a car loan is not paying it,** probably hoping that they can manage to scrape together enough money to make a payment and avoid having the car repossessed by the bank.



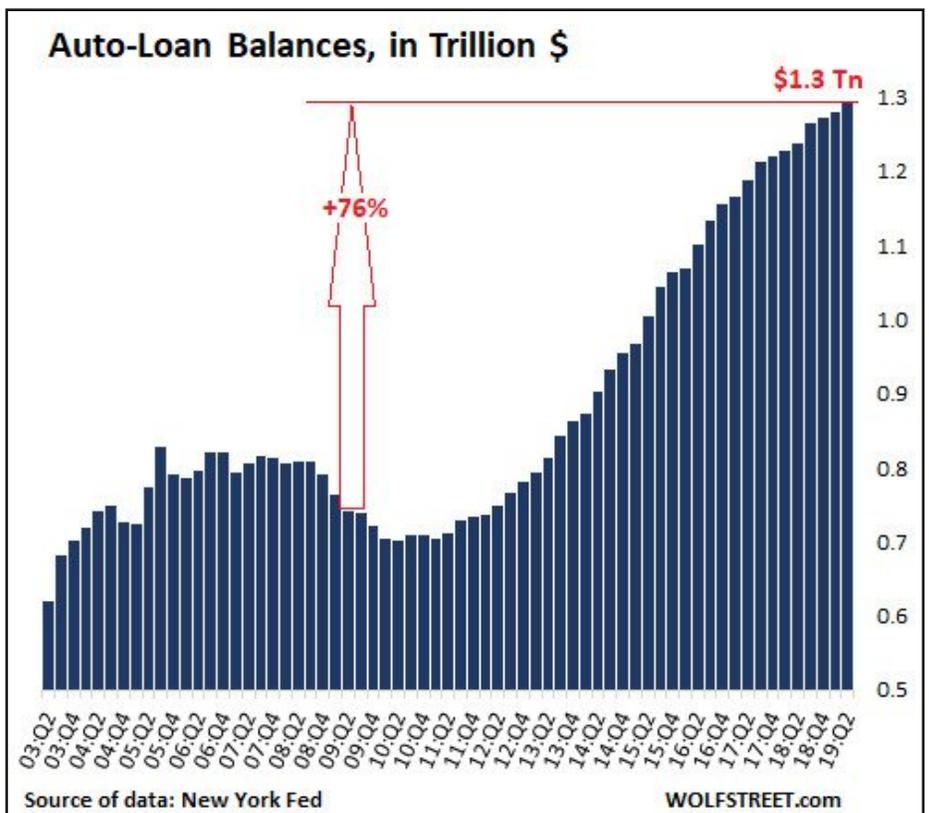
Hundreds of thousands of people are living day-to-day with the possibility of losing their means of transportation hanging over their heads. Even with this massive expansion of auto-loan debt, auto sales in the U.S. have still just barely regained the levels they were at before the financial crisis. **U.S. auto sales in 2019 are on track to be at around the same level as they were in 1999, around 17 million units, down from a peak in 2016.**

This massive increase of debt since 2008 has allowed for the auto industry to “recover” somewhat, but, like the economy in general, this “recovery” is actually the same fundamental problem being masked through massive expansion of debt. **The underlying problem of overproduction is still there: the car industry in the U.S. is churning out far more cars than people can actually buy.** This is clearly shown by the fact that auto sales in the U.S. have peaked at around the same levels as just before the 2008 crisis, and now appear to be on the downturn.

Since working people’s wages haven’t increased much, it isn’t possible to sell more and more cars every year. But because the capitalists who own the auto companies need to increase their profits every year, they have to find a way to increase sales. **They run headlong into the stagnant purchasing power of the masses, and the “solution” has been to more than double the amount of car loans in the last 10 years.**

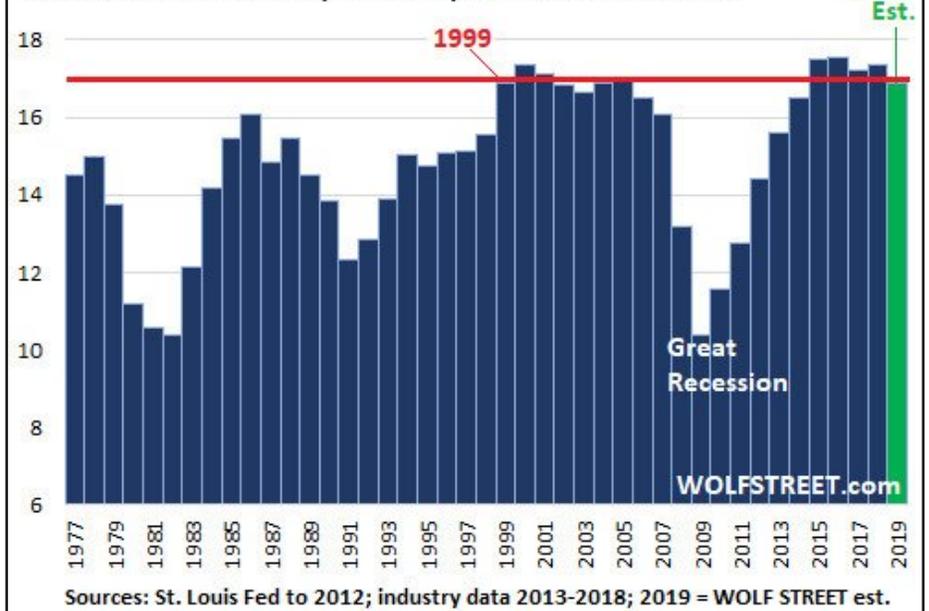
**Like all economic growth fueled by debt this is very fragile, since debt can only pile up so much before people start defaulting left and right and the crisis comes thundering back.** The fact is that they haven’t been able to increase sales beyond pre-2008 levels even with the massive expansion of debt. This shows how serious the problems are.

All around the world the amount of debt



### 20 Years of Stagnation

#### New Vehicle Sales, annual, millions of units

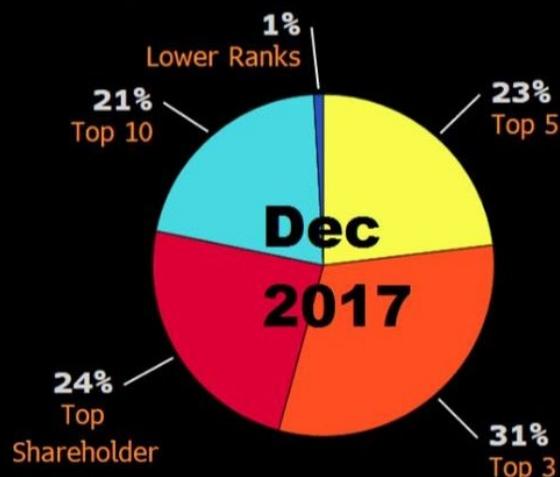


*Even with massive amounts of debt creation in the form of auto-loans, new vehicle sales are at the same level as 1999.*

has been increasing rapidly since the financial crisis. **For the whole world, the ratio of debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 225%.** GDP is a measure of total economic activity over a year. So a ratio of debt to GDP of 225% percent means that the total outstanding debt in the world today is equal to the total economic activity of the

## Nikkei 225 Dominated by Bank of Japan

Central bank's estimated shareholder ranking among companies in the index



*A 2017 estimate of the Bank of Japan's ownership of companies on the Japanese stock market. Since then the BoJ has only continued to buy more stocks.*

whole world for more than two years. So, even if somehow all economic activity could go purely towards paying down the debt it would still take more than two years to pay it off. This is an absolutely staggering amount of debt.

Short term solutions, like creating huge amounts of debt, are how the capitalist system around the world has “dealt with” the problems of the 2008 financial crisis. These “solutions” haven’t dealt with the fundamental problems of capitalism, and they haven’t even dealt with the particular manifestations of these problems that popped up in 2008. **This is why the “recovery” since 2008 isn’t really a recovery, and why the problems of 2008 are essentially all still around.**

*Short term solutions, like creating huge amounts of debt, are how the capitalist system around the world has “dealt with” the problems of the 2008 financial crisis.*

But creating mountains of debt isn’t even the most absurd thing that has happened since 2008. **In a desperate attempt to shore up the Japanese economy, the Bank of Japan started to buy up tons of stock in Japanese companies in 2013.** Their plan is to restrict the supply of

stocks in Japanese companies in order to artificially inflate the price. By doing this they hope to curb deflation, keep stock prices rising, and keep profits rolling in for big Japanese corporations.

**At this point the Bank of Japan has purchased so much stock that it is now a top-10 shareholder in 50% of Japanese companies, and it is the single largest shareholder in a growing list of companies.** This means that the central bank now has the power, whether it uses it or not, to direct huge portions of the Japanese economy all by itself. This is an unprecedented level of centralization of ownership by a central bank.

It’s also a major gift to the Japanese capitalists and an attack on the Japanese working class. One of the major goals of the stock buying

program has been to eliminate deflation. Deflation is the opposite of inflation, meaning that over time money is gradually worth more. **This means that the purchasing power of, say, \$100 will gradually increase over time, rather than decrease.** This is generally a good thing for working people, since it means that their purchasing power and therefore their standard of living increases.

In contrast, capitalists really do not like deflation and they generally try to do whatever they can to avoid it. **They don’t like it particularly because deflation makes it more difficult to pay back debt.** If a capitalist takes on debt to start a new factory or open a new branch of a store, the debt will be for a certain dollar amount. The capitalist will have to make regular monthly payments until the debt is paid off. These payments will be for the same dollar amount every month, but if there is deflation that dollar amount will represent more value than it did when the loan was taken out. This means that over time the loan payments will take away from the capitalist’s profits.

By contrast, if there is inflation the same debt payment will be worth less over time. So for the capitalist inflation is a good thing, since it makes it easier for them to pay off their debt. **For the working class it means that every year the money they make is worth less and less.** It means continued impoverishment and misery, and constant reduction in their standard of living.

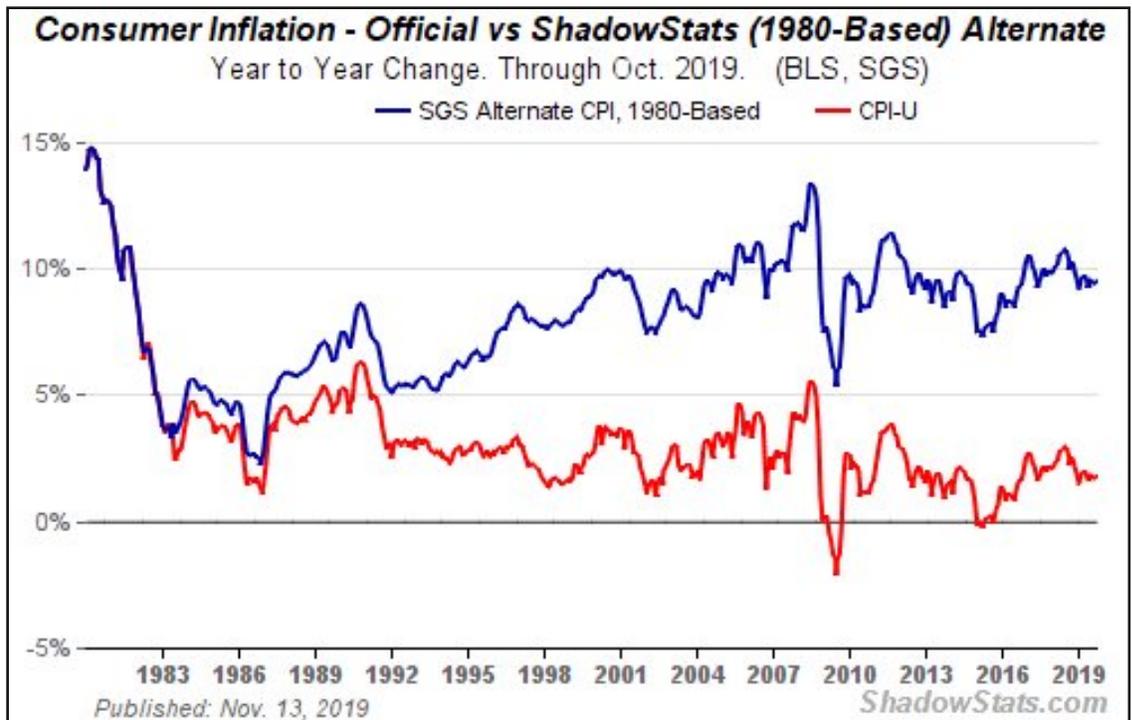
Here in the U.S. we have pretty serious inflation, so that \$100 ten years ago bought a lot more than it does today. The official number is around 2% inflation right now, but this is a misleading underestimate. If we just use instead the method that the government used in the 1980's to calculate inflation we can get a more realistic picture, and the number is around 5%. Other estimates are as

high as 10%, meaning that prices of basic goods rise by around 10% every year. But whatever the precise number is, it is clear that there is significant inflation in the U.S. which continually erodes the standard of living for the working class.

In Japan, largely because of economic stagnation in the country since the late 1980's, there is generally either close to 0% inflation or even deflation. Some years the deflation is significant, like in 2009 when deflation was over 1%. **Deflation like this means that for working people, their money is worth more without them doing anything, and over time their purchasing power actually increases.**

But as outlined above, although this is good for working people, it is inconvenient for capitalists. So, the Bank of Japan's policy of buying stocks is aimed at ensuring that Japan's currency, the Yen, starts inflating rather than deflating. This happens through increasing the money supply. **When the Bank of Japan buys stocks it is essentially printing new money to buy them.** This money creation adds a whole bunch of money to the money supply, and creates a whole series of new transactions that wouldn't have happened otherwise. This has an effect of diluting the value of the money already in circulation, leading to inflation.

But in Japan, as in the U.S., these policies



*A graph contrasting the official U.S. government inflation numbers (red) with an estimate based on their old way of calculating inflation (blue).*

are not working. **Even with such massive purchases of corporate stock—which are just another bailout for the Japanese ruling class—the Japanese economy is still not doing well.** Inflation is still low, auto sales are flat, and debt has been piling up. The fundamental economic problems are still there, so unless these problems are addressed by overthrowing capitalism in favor of socialism they will continue.

**All around the world capitalist governments are failing in their efforts to address the problems that surfaced in 2008.** Debt is piling up to unsustainable levels, central banks like the Bank of Japan and the U.S. Federal Reserve are printing money like crazy, and still there are a lot of signs that we are heading towards another crisis. The methods that the capitalists use to “address” these problems cannot possibly work, because they refuse to really consider the source of these problems.

**For capitalists they cannot possibly deal with the real roots of economic crises precisely because the root of the problem is also the source of their wealth and power.** So of course they and their supporters have to put forward all kinds of half-baked explanations for why crises happen.

But the working people of the world do not have the same interests as the capitalists. The working class is cruelly exploited by the

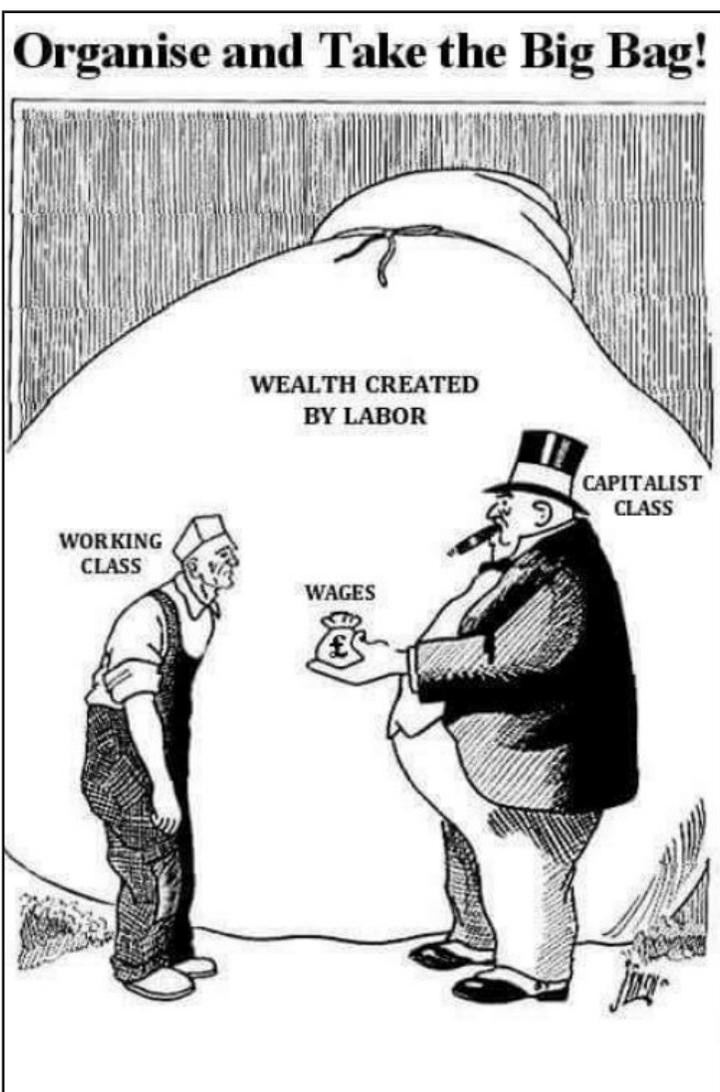
capitalists and is therefore under no obligation to defend capitalism. **The whole capitalist system is built on the exploitation of the working class, so it is in their interest to study how it works and figure out how to overthrow it.** Understanding why crises occur is a key part of this since the inevitability of crises under capitalism is a major reason why it is a decadent and outdated social system which must be done away with. It also shows that myths about capitalism being “stable” and “efficient” are vicious lies. So with that in mind, we’ll discuss why crises occur and how they relate to the fundamental relationships of capitalism.

### Why Do Capitalist Crises Happen?

Capitalist crises occur because of an inherent contradiction in the capitalist system. On a basic level, the vast majority of consumer goods which are produced under capitalism need to be bought by the workers who produce them. For example, a capitalist who owns a car factory isn't going to buy the hundreds of Honda Civics that the workers produce every day. Instead, these cars will be mostly bought by working people. **However, the exploitation of the workers, which the whole capitalist system depends on, means that the workers can never actually buy all the commodities that they produce.**

Workers are exploited under capitalism by the capitalists. While workers produce a given amount of value every day—and sometimes it’s quite a lot of value—they are not paid the full value that they produce. If they were paid all the value they produce then capitalists would be unable to make any profit. **Instead workers are only paid for the cost of being able to return to work the next day—that is, the cost of food, clothing, transportation, shelter, etc.—and all the rest of the value they produce every day is taken by the capitalist who employs them.**

For example, say that a worker at a paper mill produces an amount of paper products which have a value of \$800. **This value can be broken down into two parts: the value transferred from raw materials and from machinery, and new value created by the worker during the work-day.** Let’s say that \$200 of the value in the paper is the value of the wood pulp for the paper and other raw materials as well as the cost of operating the machinery. This value is transferred to the final product from the raw materials, but in this simple



*Despite all the propaganda about capitalists being “job-creators,” they are really social parasites who steal the wealth created by working people.*

transfer of value there isn’t a way for the capitalist to make a profit. \$200 of value from the raw materials and machinery becomes \$200 of value in the paper.

To see where the profit comes from we have to look at the value created by the worker. **If the total value of the paper products is \$800, and the cost of the raw materials, operation of the machinery, and so on is \$200, then the difference, \$600, is all value created by the worker.** This is the basis of the capitalist’s profit and of capitalist exploitation overall. Of this \$600, the worker takes home \$100 as wages for the day’s work. The capitalist, who did nothing other than own the factory and hire the worker, pockets the other \$500. This is called surplus value, because it is new value produced by the worker which is in excess of the inputs of wages, raw materials, and other production costs.



## The 10 Cities With the Highest Rents



*As rents have skyrocketed in major cities across the country, working people have been unable to even afford to keep a roof over their head.*

★ RED STAR

Even though it was the worker's labor that produced those paper products, under the system of private property, the mill owner is the one who is "entitled" to the value of these products. **The capitalist must use some of this value to pay workers' wages and the costs of operating his mill but ultimately keeps the surplus value, the difference, as profit.** This exploitation of the worker by the capitalist is the source of both the poverty of the worker and the wealth of the capitalist.<sup>1</sup>

This system totally screws over the workers. The vast majority of workers under capitalism are just scraping by. **For example, the minimum wage in Massachusetts is \$12 an hour, but the average rent**

**for a two bedroom apartment in Boston was around \$2,860 a month in November 2019!** This means that in Boston, someone who is working 40 hours a week at minimum wage would only make \$1920 a month before taxes—and on average around \$1500 after taxes—so to afford a two bedroom apartment they would have to take a second job and maybe even a third. Most working people in the U.S. have to deal with difficulties like this and are struggling just to scrape by day-to-day.

However, this system also presents the capitalists with a problem. **As we described above, the workers cannot buy all the commodities they produce.** At the level of a particular factory this problem may seem strange. In order to really get at why this is an issue we need to look at the workers *as a class*. The workers produce more value in the form of commodities, than they take

home in wages. With the wages they receive they buy things they need in the market. But all the workers in society can never buy *all* the commodities they produce because they are always producing more value than they are actually capable of buying.

So using our above example again: if a worker produces \$800 worth of goods a day, but only has enough wages to buy \$100 of those goods, the remaining \$700 is more than that worker can afford to buy. **If there are a thousand other workers at that factory, then each day those workers as a group are producing \$700,000 worth of goods that they can't afford.** And if there are 10,000 other factories like that one, then all the workers in that industry are producing \$7,000,000,000 worth of goods they can't afford, each day! This

1) For a more in-depth analysis of capitalist exploitation see "Wages and Exploitation Under Capitalism" in Issue #1 of Red Star: <https://bit.ly/2YCqOz>

problem gets especially serious when we consider that in the U.S. there are tens of millions of workers and therefore more and more goods from a whole series of industries which can't be purchased by the working class. **This tendency is characteristic of capitalist production and is called overproduction.** This is because under capitalism more goods are produced than can be purchased.

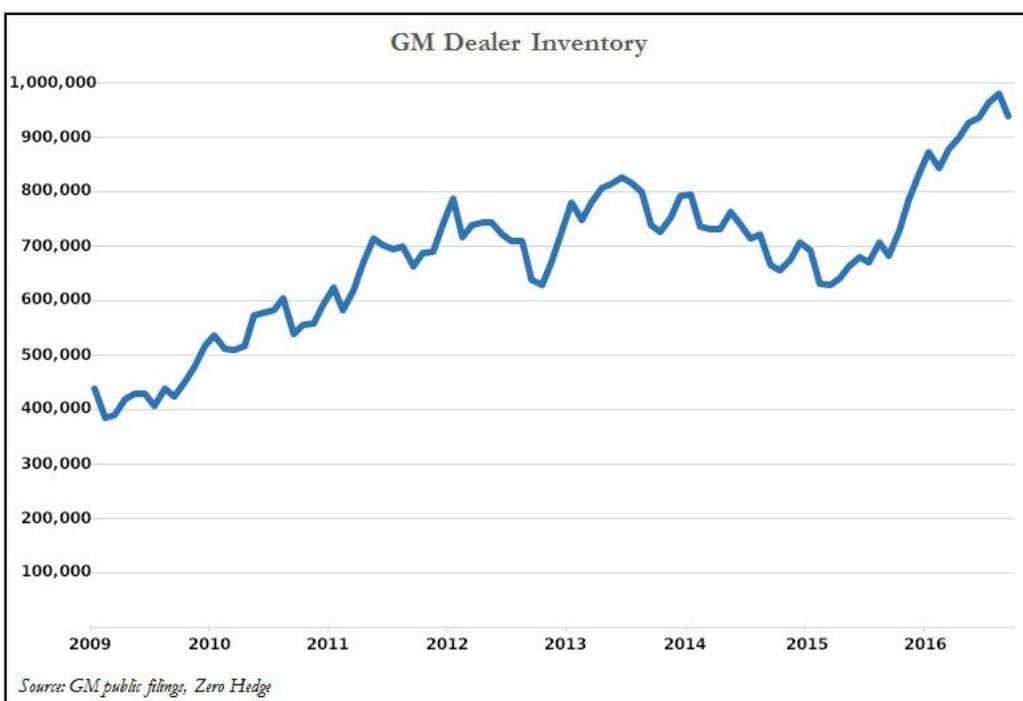
It's important to emphasize that this is only overproduction because of the systematic theft by the capitalists who exploit the workers. **Even though millions of shoes which no one can buy are produced, the**

**workers in the shoe factory will themselves be wearing worn-out shoes.** Even as cars sit and rust in lots because no one is buying them, the auto workers will be hoping to get one more year out of an old pickup truck. The workers in capitalist society in general need all kinds of basic necessities which they can't afford.

**In a socialist society the distribution of goods is handled in a different way.** Goods are produced and distributed more and more to meet social needs and not on the profit motive. This means that the full productive capabilities of society can be used, the standard of living of all the workers can be raised, and pointless waste can be reduced and then eliminated.

The capitalists want the worker to produce as much as possible in a given period of time in order to maximize their profits. But the capitalists profits can't be realized if their commodities can't be sold. If the capitalists who own paper mills have tons of warehouses of unsold paper, these are worthless to them. **Or to give a concrete example, right now Indian car manufacturers are taking huge losses because the supply of cars far outstrips the amount of cars that people are buying.** As a result, millions of unsold vehicles are being left to rust in lots.

These cars represent the wealth produced



*By 2016, General Motors had almost 1,000,000 extra unsold cars sitting on the lots of dealers across the U.S. The numbers are similar for others companies. This shows how much overproduction there actually is under capitalism.*

by the workers which the capitalists own. **But if the capitalists cannot sell the cars for cash then that wealth cannot be converted into a form that is useful for the capitalists, and the cars will eventually rust and become worthless.** At the end of the day, the capitalists are mainly concerned with their bottom line, their profit. They carry out production primarily to make a profit, and if they don't make a profit they will inevitably go out of business.

**Simply put, the capitalists can't make a profit if these goods are not being sold! If they can't sell their goods, then it is a waste of money for them to hire workers or buy raw materials.** These goods do not go unsold because no one needs them, but simply because workers are unable to afford them.

**For instance, in the U.S. there are more than 17,000,000 extra homes—and this doesn't even account for excess apartments!** And yet we still have hundreds of thousands of homeless people across the country. Despite the fact that millions of people in the U.S. live in poverty, the capitalists would rather let unsold goods rot, or even destroy them, than give them away. For example, in 2016 U.S. farmers dumped **43,000,000 gallons of milk** that they could not sell—enough to fill 66 Olympic swimming pools.

In order to hold off the inevitable crisis of overproduction, the capitalists encourage people to take on debt. This is done through things like credit cards, mortgages, and various types of loans, including student loans and car loans. In the short-term this debt increases people's purchasing power, allowing them to buy more commodities. **However, this is just borrowing from the future—people buy goods with money they don't have now, but hypothetically will obtain in the future.** In order to make this profitable, lenders give out loans at interest, meaning over time the amount of money people owe to the lender gradually increases. Because of this, people's purchasing power actually ends up decreasing in the long run when they take on debt. The more debt people take on in the short-term, the less likely in the long term they will ever be able to pay it off.

*The more debt people take on in the short-term, the less likely in the long term they will ever be able to pay it off.*

The problem of overproduction eventually leads the capitalist system headlong into a crisis. As long as they can, the capitalists will promote the illusion of great prosperity in the markets to encourage economic growth. However, sooner or later, it will become apparent in one or several industries that production has far outstripped the purchasing power of the masses. **The capitalists have difficulties selling their goods, and as a result, banks stop lending to industries, and capitalists grow wary about investing to increase production when demand is falling.**

This dynamic causes growth to slow and soon economic anxiety spreads to other

## Total Consumer Debt (Excl. Mortgages)



*U.S. consumer debt has skyrocketed to new all-time highs in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Working people have been forced to take on more and more debt just to pay the bills.*

industries. For example, if a boom in the construction industry starts to slow then inevitably all the related fields will be affected by this—steel and timber production will take a loss, banks will be less likely to lend money, etc. Soon, massive quantities of unsold goods pile up and their market price plummets. **Unable to turn these goods into profit, the capitalists decide to make drastic cuts to production by laying off thousands of workers and shutting down factories and stores.** Investments and loans become unprofitable and some capitalists become unable to repay their debt which causes banks to close and people's savings to disappear overnight. Small and medium-sized businesses fold. Stable work becomes difficult to find, and unemployment skyrockets.

Unable to pay their bills, many people lose their homes and are forced to live on the streets. This chaos affects the whole society, but the worst effects are felt by the working class. **Moreover, the capitalists will always try to find a way to place the blame of the crisis on our backs—blaming the people for being too stingy and not spending enough on commodities, or for making bad financial decisions.**

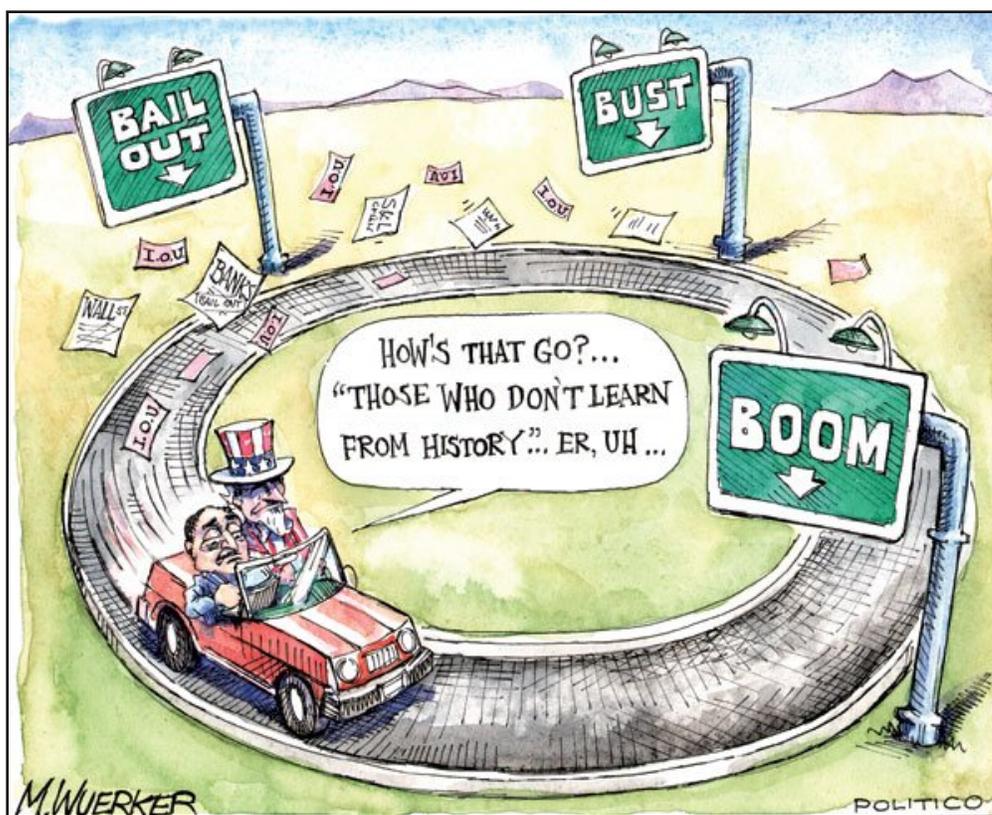
For example, in 2008, victims of predatory

mortgages were blamed as being too “greedy” or “naive,” when it was the banks and lenders who peddled these loans to poor people in the first place. **The capitalists spread the lie that poor people being unable to pay their mortgages nearly led to the collapse of the world economy!** Some talking-heads even argued that the crisis was because people left their refrigerator doors open too much! All of this serves as an ideological cover for a series of austerity measures that the capitalists and their government roll out. To preserve their interests and protect their profits, the capitalists depress wages, cut social programs, raise taxes, and increase inflation.

Capitalism operates on a “boom-bust” cycle, so eventually the crisis gives way to a “recovery” of sorts. **The laws of this absurd and oppressive system dictate that since the crisis is caused by overproduction, it can only be resolved by massively limiting production.** The capitalists accomplish this by destroying massive amounts of capital (such as factories and unsold goods). With many businesses going bankrupt, entire factories will cease production and be left to rust and fall into disrepair.

This is one way for the problem of overproduction to temporarily resolve itself. **As a whole bunch of factories close and companies go out of business the level of production will drop far below a “boom” level, and the economy will settle into a depression.** This in turn creates a whole series of new opportunities for investment and for economic growth to replace the now-disabled factories. In this way the emergence of an economic crisis and depression can form the basis for a new boom.

However, these sorts of recoveries are quite lopsided. With the destruction wrought by the crisis, a few big and successful capitalists are able to eat up many failing enterprises and gain an advantage over their rival capitalists. This means that with the completion of each cycle capital tends to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.



*A political cartoon depicting the boom-bust-bailout cycle. The cartoon portrays this as a vicious circle, but in reality it is a downward spiral.*

**Thus with every “recovery” the contradictions of capitalism heighten, and working people are left worse off than they were before the crisis hit.** Even if people are able to recover a bit, they must contend with another crisis just a few years down the road.

**For this reason, the classic “boom-bust” cycle was very common in the early history of capitalism.** During the second half of the 1800’s the boom-bust cycle itself helped the capitalists to consolidate control over the whole economies of capitalist countries. This led to the creation of huge monopolies and multi-national corporations. The biggest firms which were better-able to “weather the storm” of a crisis, were often able to buy up a number of their bankrupt competitors on the cheap and thus gain greater and greater control over markets and resources.

As these huge corporations got bigger and bigger they consolidated control over the markets and resources of whole countries. **This led them also to gain a large degree of control over the governments of those countries.** From this point onward the nature of capitalist crises changed somewhat: the crises still happen, the overproduction is still there, but the biggest corporations and banks very rarely go out of business.

The “bust” portion of the boom-bust cycle is partially prevented through massive government intervention in the economy, such as the stock-buying program of the Bank of Japan, and the 2008 U.S. bank bailout. **In the case of Japan, if the “bust” were allowed to simply go forward without the intervention of the government, a whole series of Japanese corporations would go out of business and the Japanese economy would suffer a major recession.** With the state intervention, the economy instead settles into an extended period of stagnation and slow growth. This is because the intervention is unable to really resolve the underlying problem but is able to temporarily mask it for a time. But there are limits to how long they can do this, and when these measures finally stop working the resulting crisis will be even more severe.



*The German city of Dresden during WWII after the U.S. and Allied Forces firebombed the city. The destruction of huge amounts of capital in cities and factories created the basis for the Post-War Boom.*

*In World War II the industrial base of Japan and of most of Europe was essentially totally destroyed.*

The only other real “way out” of crises for the capitalist system is to destroy huge amounts of capital through war. During wars—and especially during the two massive world wars of the 20th century—factories, infrastructure, housing, and even whole cities are destroyed. Huge amounts of social wealth are totally destroyed, creating a huge need for building materials, new machines and tools, transportation infrastructure, power plants, and so on. The temporary increase in demand can alleviate the overproduction crisis for a time, but the increased demand due to rebuilding does not last forever.

For instance, in World War II the industrial base of Japan and of most of Europe was essentially totally destroyed. **In Japan this**

**led to massive economic growth following the war as Japanese and American capitalists rebuilt the Japanese cities and factories which had been brutally destroyed by U.S. bombing campaigns.** Although it was very strong for a time, this economic growth did not last, and by the late 1980s the Japanese economy was experiencing major difficulties. This led to an extended period of stagnation from which the Japanese economy has not yet escaped.

This is the case with the U.S. economy as well. **After the 2008 crisis a whole series of efforts were made to stave off economic collapse from outright printing of money to massive expansion of debt.** These measures have prolonged and temporarily alleviated the fundamental economic problem of overproduction, but the problem is still there. At some point in the future, and possibly fairly soon, this problem will re-assert itself with disastrous results for people in this country and around the world. Many people will lose their jobs and their houses, a lot of companies will go under, and things will get much more unstable around the world.

### **Organizing During Crises**

Although capitalist economic crises are times of major difficulty for a lot of people, it is also true that they are major political openings for revolutionary politics. The great masses of people



*A protest of the Unemployed Council in 1930, outside the White House. This protest, organized by the Communist Party - USA, was one of many integrated protests they organized during the Great Depression which emphasized the unity of white and Black workers against capitalism.*

are screwed over, and a smaller and smaller amount of rich people reap the benefits of the “recovery.” **This presents a lot of opportunities for revolutionaries to clarify to people the basic structure of capitalist society and how it screws over working people.**

Outside of a crisis the capitalist class generally has success in convincing the masses that capitalism is either the best possible system or the only possible system. **Especially in a powerful imperialist country like the U.S., workers are bombarded with ruling-class ideology that convinces many of them that they have a chance of becoming wealthy and successful themselves within the system.** These ideas are very powerful, and they are crammed into people’s heads in movies and TV from a very young age. However, during a crisis these illusions are more easily defeated. The daily suffering of the masses increases significantly, and the ruling class often has to take drastic measures to protect their interests, such as the massive bailout of the banks in 2008. All this makes it easier to expose to people how they are being screwed over by the capitalists.

Although crises provide a fertile ground for revolutionary organizing, it is also possible for reactionary forces to use them to their benefit. **The capitalists may have some success in using far-right politics to distract the masses from the real source of the problem, for instance by blaming the economic troubles on immigrants.** So while we should be ready to

organize in response to economic crises, we also need to keep in mind the ways these crises can provide openings for far-right forces as well.

To understand better how capitalist crises are political openings, it’s worth looking at a concrete example. In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, many young people saw the ugly reality of capitalism for the first time. **They saw how the state worked to enrich the big capitalists at the expense of the many.** They saw the injustice of the bank bailout and the Federal Reserve printing trillions of dollars to keep the financial

system afloat. They also saw the contrast with their own lives: many were burdened with crushing student debt and were finding grim employment prospects.

In September 2011, having seen little change in the situation for the masses, thousands of people flocked to New York’s Zuccotti Park to protest against widespread economic inequality in what became known as Occupy Wall Street. The protestors saw the need for sustained protests and actions. They set up tents in the park for weeks, and similar encampments soon sprung up all over the country. **They took up the slogans of “the 99% vs. the 1%” and “we are the 99%”—recognizing their struggle as the struggle of the great masses of people against a tiny minority of exploiting parasites.**

This movement was not without issues. From the beginning, the “Occupy” movement was disorganized, and struggled to provide a clear way forward. Mass meetings were organized during Occupy to decide key political questions, but these meetings were run on the basis consensus instead of on majority-rule. **This meant that everyone present had to agree to proposals before they could be implemented which made it very easy for police infiltrators to disrupt things.** All they had to do was send one person in to vote “no” on any radical proposal to defeat it. Even if the person voting “no” could offer no good explanation as to why they were opposed to the proposal, they could still block the whole movement from going forward.

These issues prevented Occupy from developing into the kind of movement that could persist and grow and really change things in this country. Instead when the weather started to get cold, the police and other repressive forces were able to eventually evict all the protesters from the park leading to an effective end of the movement. During Occupy a lot of people saw issues with the approach being taken, but they weren't able to successfully struggle to change them. Ultimately things fell apart because of these issues with the movement.

Although Occupy was ultimately unsuccessful in many respects, we can still take a lot of lessons from it. **For one thing, people all across the country were so fed up with their situation and the lies of the ruling class that they got involved in Occupy as soon as they heard what was going on.** In Zuccotti park there were people from all over the country, and other Occupy encampments sprang up in dozens of cities. This shows us that when the economic situation gets really difficult a lot of people will want to get involved in politics, some for the first time in their lives. This is itself a good thing, but it poses difficulties as well.

*Ideas and principles should be decided by a majority, tested in practice, and subjected to debate and criticism on a long-term basis.*

When a lot of members of the masses are getting involved in politics for the first time, it's especially important to have **pro-people forms of organization ready to work to advance the struggle.** At Occupy, one of the major difficulties was that there was a relatively

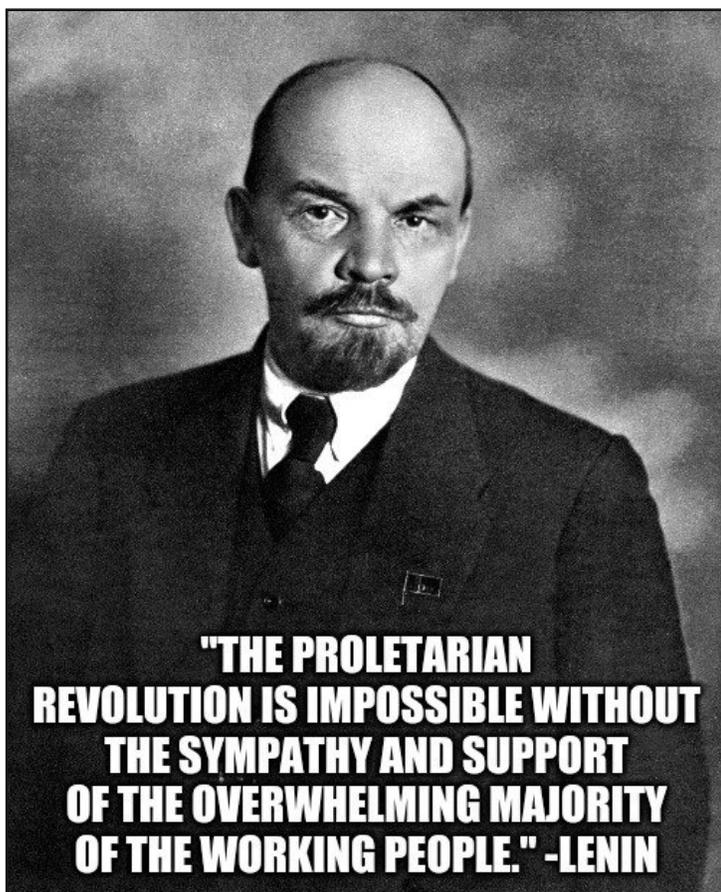


*Occupy Wall Street marched across the Brooklyn Bridge in September, 2011. This was just one of the many successful actions they took during the brief existence of the movement.*

spontaneous form of organization that was set up. Decisions to adopt certain ideas and principles, such as consensus-based decision-making, weren't made on the basis of a careful study of the history of people's movements. Instead, consensus-based decision-making was adopted because it seemed to some like it would be oppressive or hierarchical to have simple majority rule instead.

But if people had learned a bit about revolutionary history, they would have known that the police and reactionary forces will go to very great lengths to disrupt and attack people's movements, so it's necessary to adopt forms of organization that prevent infiltrators from disrupting things. **Moreover, struggle over the way forward is the lifeblood of any movement, and consensus-based decision-making ignores the fact that differences over the way forward cannot be resolved immediately.** Instead, ideas and principles should be decided by a majority, tested in practice, and subjected to debate and criticism on a long-term basis. In this way, the majority may over time decide a new position based on their practical experience.

This is one of the concrete reasons why it's necessary to have a developed revolutionary movement and revolutionary organization.



*Lenin and other revolutionaries have been clear about the importance of winning the support of the vast majority of working people.*

Without it, and without a study of revolutionary history, surges in mass enthusiasm like Occupy tend to either fizzle out without accomplishing much or persist as reformist efforts drained of their radical politics. To guide things forward in a better way we have to study revolutionary history so we don't repeat errors of the past. We also need to build struggles based among the working class for the overthrow of capitalism.

*The emancipation of the working class is bound up with the liberation of humanity from all forms of oppression.*

This is not to say that other classes are not important in the struggle against capitalism, but that the nature of the working class makes it uniquely suited to play a leading role in the revolution. In a capitalist society the workers ultimately produce all the wealth of the

society, so they have the ability to withhold their labor and threaten the profits of the ruling class.

Under capitalism, a large section of the working class works in large workplaces with many other people, such as factories or big stores like Wal-Mart. This means that working people have a lot of experience working together on a large scale. **It also means that their political struggles at workplaces entail a large number of people working together for a shared goal. This experience gives them a unique ability to organize for large-scale change and even revolution.**

What's more, the working class faces a unique form of oppression. Most groups of oppressed people have specific issues to overcome in their struggle for liberation: for women, patriarchy; for Black, Latino and indigenous people, white supremacy; for immigrants, xenophobia. **Each of these struggles are significant, but each is only a partial struggle towards the ultimate goal of the elimination of all oppression.** Each can achieve the end to their particular form of oppression without ending oppression as such.

The oppression of the working class, on the other hand, is the most general form of oppression. Other forms of oppression affect particular groups, and while struggles against them should be taken up by all people, it's possible for other forms of oppression to be eliminated without eliminating oppression as such. This is not the case for the liberation of the working-class from exploitation. **Precisely because the oppression of the working class is a general form of oppression, there is not a specific or particular form of oppression that working class can eliminate to liberate themselves. Instead, they must overcome all forms of oppression in order to be free from the general oppression of wage slavery.** Therefore, the emancipation of the working class is bound up with the liberation of humanity from all forms of oppression. For this reason the working class has a key role to play in the struggle to overthrow capitalism and the struggle to eliminate all forms of oppression.

**Some involved in Occupy understood the necessity of a revolutionary organization based in the working class, but there were many who disagreed.** A lot of people who joined the Occupy protests were not themselves from a working-class background, but were college-educated people from a middle-class background.

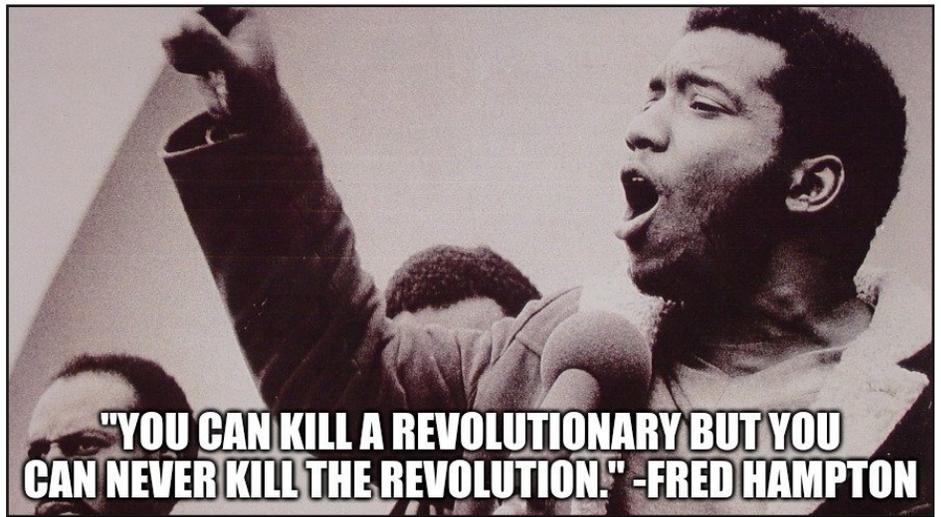
Many of these people were facing severe downward economic pressure because of the crisis, and generally had worse career prospects than their parents. Many of them were serious about the struggle, but they also had a lot of limitations which narrowed the scope of the movement.

Of course, the ruling class in this country will still attack and try to destroy even a mass movement with serious issues. **They will attempt to co-opt its leadership and seed it with informants and agent provocateurs, in hopes of running it into the ground.** The state was keeping tabs on activists even before the Zuccotti park encampment was started during Occupy Wall Street. This is because they know that as the people unite in struggle and begin to sum up their successes and failures, they may well start to see the need for a more revolutionary approach.

*Ultimately it's possible for the people to unite and overthrow capitalism, even in the face of harsh repression from the ruling class.*

The ruling class is not willing to risk this possibility and they do everything in their power to ensure that mass movements either fizzle out or turn into some sort of dead-end. **But if people get organized and learn from previous big political movements like Occupy and from revolutionary struggles around the world, we can build a big revolutionary movement to fight against exploitation and oppression.** Ultimately it's possible for the people to unite and overthrow capitalism, even in the face of harsh repression from the ruling class. In the words of Fred Hampton: *"You can kill a revolutionary, but you can never kill the revolution."*

**In the inevitable coming crisis, the task of revolutionaries is to seize on the many political openings that will arise.** When the capitalists attack the people with austerity measures, layoffs, evictions, and foreclosures,



*Fred Hampton, Deputy Chairman of the Black Panther Party, spoke about the ability of revolutionary movements to overcome the crackdowns and violence of the oppressors.*

people will inevitably fight back in both big and small ways. We will need to unite with these struggles wherever they arise and draw them together into an unstoppable force.

We also need to study how the capitalist system functions, and work to build broad awareness that the only solution to the problems of capitalism is to overthrow the ruling class. **In the U.S. at present, we are a long way from revolution, so we must bear in mind that revolutionary work must be patient work.** However, in the coming crisis the people can make a lot of advances, provided we get organized.★

**So, let's build the revolutionary movement!  
A better world is possible!**



# History of the BPP Part 5: The Basis for the Split

by Smith

*This is the fifth of a seven part series on the history, legacy, and continuing relevance of the Black Panther Party (BPP). Founded in 1966 in the spirit of the politics of the late Malcolm X, and highly influenced by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, the Black Panther Party was a Black revolutionary organization. For a time they played the leading role in the Black Liberation struggle in the U.S. and inspired people across the country to take up revolutionary politics. This stood in sharp contrast to many prominent voices in the civil rights movement who pushed for making peace with white supremacist capitalist society. In the previous article we discussed the revolutionary organizing of the Chicago chapter of the Black Panther Party and the assassination of Fred Hampton. In this article we will analyze the issues and conflicts in the Black Panther Party that created the basis for the eventual split in the Party. These issues include problems with communication and coordination between national leadership and local chapters, theoretical differences over revolutionary strategy, and repression from the FBI and U.S. Government.*



As the Black Panther Party (BPP) grew and developed it faced a series of different obstacles and contradictions. The Party's transformation from a small revolutionary organization in the Bay Area to a national organization with dozens of chapters in different cities brought a whole series of new questions and challenges. When the BPP was a relatively small organization in the Bay, it was easy enough to work together and to resolve issues and political differences. **However, in coordinating revolutionary organizing across the country, a whole bunch of new challenges arose, not the least of which was state repression from the police, politicians, and FBI.**

Unfortunately, as the Panthers grew they made a series of major mistakes that increasingly limited their ability to function as a revolutionary organization. These mistakes included operating too openly in the face of violent state repression, being too quick to accept people as members, creating

opportunist alliances with unprincipled political organizations, and functioning in an undemocratic fashion which left the Central Committee unwilling and unable to effectively respond to feedback and criticism from rank-and-file members and local leaders. **As these mistakes began to add up, they resulted in deep rifts in the leadership of the party.** In particular, Huey P. Newton and other leaders in Oakland came into increasing conflict with branches throughout the country as well as with Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver who was then living in exile in Algeria.

Through their Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)<sup>1</sup> the FBI was able to exploit these rifts and foment animosity in the Party leadership which ultimately lead to a split.

1) COINTELPRO was an FBI "counter-intelligence" program designed to destroy revolutionary groups like the Panthers.

While there were significant political differences in the Central Committee, as well as between the Central Committee and local leadership, it was not inevitable that the split would occur. **If the Party had handled things differently it could have been avoided and the mistakes, though significant, could have been rectified.** Instead, the Party split, with one section, under the leadership of Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, adopting a reformist electoral strategy that gave up on revolution, and another section, loosely organized under the leadership of Eldridge Cleaver, adopting the adventurist tactics of isolated incidents of urban guerilla warfare. The former continued to operate under the name of the Black Panther Party, while the latter called itself the Black Liberation Army. In addition to this, there were a number of branches which disagreed with Huey P. Newton and the Oakland leadership, but did not join the Black Liberation Army.

The split itself occurred because of a complex mix of internal issues and external pressures.

**The major catalyst for the split was Huey P. Newton's decision to expel the Panther 21—members of the NYC party branch who were on trial for their lives as the state tried to frame them—after he received fake letters (written by the FBI) which convinced him the NYC Panthers were planning to assassinate him.** Eldridge Cleaver responded to the expulsion of the Panther 21 by publicly criticizing Huey on national television. Eldridge's criticisms of Huey were fueled by letters sent to him by the FBI, in which they posed as Panthers and smeared Huey, claiming that he was living a luxurious life off of the backs of the rank-and-file members.

This deep mistrust and paranoia in the

1 - [REDACTED]  
12/16/69  
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SAC, San Francisco (157-601)  
EX-111  
Director, FBI (100-448006) 1546

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE PROGRAM  
BLACK NATIONALISTS - HATE GROUPS  
RACIAL INTELLIGENCE  
BLACK PANTHER PARTY (BPP)

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Enclosed is a copy of the Black Panther Party (BPP) letterhead stationery in possession of the Bureau. It does not appear that this stationery would be currently in use by the BPP as some of the officials listed as members of the Central Committee no longer are members.

You should obtain several blank pieces of the letterhead stationery presently in use by the BPP National Headquarters. On one type your proposed expulsion letter exactly as you desire it to appear. The signature will be added by the laboratory. Date the letter sufficiently far in advance to allow for time consumed in mailing to Bureau, preparation in the laboratory and mailing back to your office. A date two weeks in advance would probably be about right. Furnish several blank pieces of stationery for possible laboratory use.

The letter you prepare will be reproduced by the laboratory after addition of the signature and sufficient copies will be run off for the mailing. You should advise as to the method that would ordinarily be utilized by BPP headquarters in reproducing the letter, i.e. Xeroxing or some other method. It is assumed that BPP headquarters would not type each letter separately in a mailing of this nature.

Furnish FBI number of individual who will be shown as signer of the letter to facilitate locating fingerprint card of that person for signature comparison.

Advise as to whether you desire each letter signed individually or whether only the "master letter" need be signed and the signature reproduced along with the text of the letter.

Upon completion of the letters at the Bureau they will be returned to you for addressing and mailing.

Enclosure

HEH:bjpl:jf(4)

DEC 29 1969

MAILED 23  
DEC 16 1969  
COMM-FBI

SEE NOTE PAGE TWO

*A 1969 FBI memo instructing agents on how to forge letters to make it look like they were written by the Party. These techniques were used to sow division within the BPP.*

BPP was fueled by COINTELPRO and the FBI's forged letters, but it was only possible because there were deeper issues in the Party. For example, neither Huey nor Eldridge double-checked with the supposed authors of the letters they received to confirm their validity. They were both too quick to accept the lies that they read, and the FBI had written the letters to appeal to both Huey and Eldridge's egos. Likewise, being publicly open about the membership of their Central Committee made leaders easy targets for state-sponsored violence and repression, which only fueled mistrust and paranoia.

The Panthers were eventually crippled and

defeated by the mistakes that led to the split. **Unfortunately both sides of the split had made serious errors and were unable to rectify these issues after going their separate ways.** Instead, the Panthers under Huey's leadership shifted towards reformism and electoral politics, eventually recalling all the branches to Oakland so they could be under the more direct control of the Central Committee and to funnel people into a campaign to get Bobby Seale elected as Mayor of Oakland. The Black Liberation Army members either were killed, were arrested, went into exile, or dropped out of revolutionary politics altogether, and the loosely organized cells fell apart.

The split and the eventual defeat of the Panthers were huge setbacks for the revolutionary movement in this country. **Therefore, revolutionaries today must learn from these mistakes and develop effective strategies to link open and underground work in a manner that defends against state repression and allows for effective coordination between branches of a revolutionary party in different cities.**

### **Basis for the Split**

**While government repression and the FBI's COINTELPRO played a huge role in the split, it's important to see that it was actually primarily internal issues in the Panthers that led to the divisions in the Party.** The FBI was able to take advantage of these issues, and deepen the animosity between leaders in the BPP, but if the internal issues in the Party had not existed in the first place—or if the BPP had handled these issues better—the FBI would not have been able to take advantage of them.

**One of the main issues that the Panthers faced was how to handle the rapid growth of the Party. In 1968 they had around 800 members in a number of cities around the country.** This was already a big increase from the several dozen members they had when they protested at the California State Capitol in May of 1967. This growth allowed the Panthers to take on a huge



*Although the expulsion of the Panther 21 would play a big role in the split, this was never inevitable. After their arrest, huge mass protests broke out against the pigs efforts to frame the Panthers yet again.*

number of tasks. They ran community programs including a news service, a petition drive for community control of the cops, liberation schools, free breakfast programs for children, free medical clinics, free clothing drives, free busing to prisons, senior programs, and more.

The possibilities only increased after the Party membership ballooned from 800 to around 4,000 in the 18 months following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The killing of MLK left many Black folks feeling that it was not possible to change the system from within, and the Panthers were the best organized and most significant revolutionary Black organization in the country. Naturally many people flocked to the Panthers. **And even when people did not join the Party outright, they started reading the Panthers' newspaper, which grew to a peak of over 200,000 copies sold each week.**

Despite the incredible growth of the Party, new issues also arose, and they actually arose in part because of the growth of the Party. **For one thing, the BPP did not have a systematic approach for dealing with the new members and branches springing up.** The Panthers only required recruits to study the Panthers' 10 Point Program and a few other documents to become full members. This generally consisted in a few weeks of political education before someone officially joined the Party.





*Mumia Abu-Jamal talking on the phone in the Philadelphia office of the BPP, 1969.*

However, the U.S. is a very oppressive, racist, and patriarchal country, and these ideas—which are primarily promoted by the ruling class—are internalized by the people in many ways. **Even when someone calls themselves a revolutionary and wants to join an organization like the Black Panther Party, they still will have internalized many aspects of the oppressive ideology of the capitalists pigs who run this country.** Therefore, transforming into a dedicated revolutionary is a long-term process, which cannot be accomplished by a few weeks of political education alone.

This is something that the Chicago chapter of the BPP dealt with pretty well. They initially had a big influx of members, and even though everyone in the chapter knew the 10 Point Program and had completed the introductory political education, Fred Hampton and other local leaders recognized that many members still had a ways to go before they became fully-dedicated revolutionaries. **So, they stopped accepting new members to the Chicago chapter for a time,**

**and instead focused their efforts on consolidating existing members and struggling against negative tendencies like individualism.**

However these efforts were largely confined to the Chicago chapter, and other branches did not adopt a similar strategy. This led to many people joining the Party who would later drop out due to hardships. Many people who were not truly revolutionary also joined the Party during this time. This could have been a good thing if there had been a systematic plan to help these people become revolutionaries. **However, this didn't generally happen, so some of these new recruits pushed the local chapters in different negative directions, from reformism to unprincipled alliances with unreliable groups.** Perhaps even more negative was that the FBI was able to take advantage of the Panthers' hasty approach to new recruits, and seed local chapters with snitches and provocateurs.

The Panthers as a national organization also made some mistakes as new potential chapters sprang up. For example, in the Spring of 1969 a group of people in Philadelphia wanted to organize themselves into a branch of the Black Panther Party. **When they called the National Office, they spoke to then-BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard who simply told them "You don't have to be a Panther to make revolution," and left it at that.** He proposed no steps to work with them as they tried to get a Philadelphia branch of the Party off the ground. Mumia Abu-Jamal, a member of the group who was trying to found the BPP chapter, described how this response from the National Office confused him and others in Philadelphia:

*"[Hilliard's] statement, while objectively true, did not discourage those of us who were determined to join the organization that seemed closest to our dreams. The meetings [in Philadelphia] continued, as we pondered National's seeming indifference. Did they get calls like that all the time? Were they being cautious of folks they didn't know? Were they seriously trying to limit expansion? Was this a test, to see if we were serious about opening a branch? **These questions were never sufficiently answered.**"<sup>2</sup>*

After a determined effort by Mumia and others, the National Office eventually did recognize the Philadelphia chapter. However, the unsystematic manner in which the Party dealt with the founding of new chapters led to a lot of

2) Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, p. 47

issues. At times the Panthers were too quick to welcome new chapters into the Party without first ensuring that they understood and agreed with the Party's politics and program. At other times, they were too dismissive and failed to even investigate the potential chapters. This discouraged a lot of people who were looking to get involved in the BPP and the larger struggle for Black Liberation and revolution.

**This rapid and disorganized growth of the Party also meant that even when branches did get going in new cities and even when they were full of dedicated revolutionaries, difficulties in communication arose between these branches and the Party leadership.** This fed

into mistrust between national and local leaders, which Huey and the Central Committee increasingly handled by adopting a commandist approach. Instead of listening to local input and respecting the views of local leaders and their knowledge of the local situation, Huey and the others became increasingly dismissive and began to view all dissent as a problem rather than part of the normal functioning of democracy within a revolutionary organization.

*This fed into mistrust between national and local leaders, which Huey and the Central Committee increasingly handled by adopting a commandist approach.*

**In order to function as an effective revolutionary organization at the national level it is essential to have good coordination between the national and local leaders, to encourage democratic discussion and debate, and to develop a culture of comradely support and trust in branches and between them.** Unfortunately the Panthers made a series of mistakes on this front that they were never able to properly assess, understand, and address.

As disagreements with the leadership of



*Big Bob Bey (front left), Elbert (Big Man) Howard (front center), and Audrey Jones (front right) at a press conference in front of the BPP's Washington D.C. headquarters. Through his connection to Huey, Bey was able to negatively influence events across the country.*

Huey P. Newton grew, the Central Committee responded by sending Oakland Panthers to other branches to run things in the place of local leaders. Needless to say, this led to a lot of animosity. For example, Huey sent his personal body guard Robert "Big Bob" Bey to be an emissary to the New York branch in the Bronx in 1970. Bey was one of Huey's oldest friends, but he was not cut out to lead the New York Panthers, who were already a well organized force despite facing heightened police repression. In her autobiography, *Assata*, Assata Shakur describes these issues: "We had a bit of a leadership problem with Robert Bey and Jolly, who were both from the West Coast. **Bey's problem was that he was none too bright and that he had an aggressive, even belligerent, way of talking and dealing with people. Jolly's problem was that he was Robert Bey's shadow.**"<sup>3</sup>

On her first day working in the Harlem office, Bey berated Assata for leaving her Panther newspapers on a desk instead of in their proper place on a rack. No one had ever explained this procedure to her. Assata responded by criticizing Bey for his bureaucratic tendencies and his abrasive demeanor. **After she left the office, he expelled her from Party.** The next day after she told him off, he apologized and reinstated her.

3) Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography*, p. 222

While this incident may seem relatively minor, it actually reveals deep issues in the Party at the time. **Assata was able to win her reinstatement and continued to be involved in the Panthers' work, despite her concerns about Bey's leadership; however, many others were expelled or driven away by the abrasive and bureaucratic attitude of Bey and other leaders sent by Huey to run other Party branches.**

Mumia Abu-Jamal emphasizes that it was Bey's personal loyalty to Huey—instead of his political clarity, leadership abilities, or skills as an organizer—that led him to be appointed to leadership of the New York Branch:

*"The term 'Huey's Party' arose when Big Bob Bey, one of Huey's personal bodyguards and a former Captain from West Oakland, became a personal emissary from Newton to the New York branch in the Bronx[...]As one of Huey's oldest friends, and a dyed in-the-wool Panther, Big Bob regarded any deviation from proper Party ideology or form as more a personal than a political affront.*

*"He became well-known among New York Panthers and dreaded for his fits of temper. He reflected an unbending allegiance to the Minister of Defense, and his countrified Californese could be heard bellowing in offices throughout the five boroughs: 'Nigga, I ain't lettin' you do nuthin' that'll fuck up this Party! Uh-Uhn! Not this Party, not Huey P. Newton 's Party!'*

*"Big Bob's reference was more than rhetorical, for, in fact, in essence, in people's heads, it was Huey's Party. He was the first Panther in the hearts and minds of his comrades."<sup>4</sup>*

Mumia's analysis is important not only because it shows the limitations of Bey as a leader, but also because it helps to explain why Bey was accepted as a leader despite his obvious shortcomings. It was not simply that Huey and the Central Committee imposed their will on the



*People in the community frequently gathered around the BPP's Harlem office. In this way the BPP's offices served as places for the people to gather and discuss issues in the community and around the country.*

other branches. In the minds of many Panthers Huey was the leader and the Party was Huey's. **This reflected deeper issues of individual leadership in the Panthers, and these issues are a symptom of the broader individualism in U.S. society.** This is important to see, because the Panthers, while a strong revolutionary organization, were also a product of the society in which they existed. They did amazing work to struggle against oppressive attitudes in the U.S. and within their organization, but they were blind to some, and unable to fully overcome others.

This appointment of Bey to run the NYC branch of the Panthers came at a time of increased tensions between the East and West Coast Panthers. **Huey had just been released from jail and during his time behind bars the New York Panthers had risen to national prominence.** The FBI and NYPD had tried to frame the "Panther 21" in New York on ridiculous phony charges, and this outrageous campaign of political suppression had catapulted the New York Panthers into the national spotlight. Afeni Shakur, Dhoruba bin Wahad, Lumumba Shakur, Michael "Cetawayo" Tabor, Beth Mitchell, and Zayd Malik Shakur in particular were well spoken and charismatic organizers. Before being framed in the Panther 21 trial they all had tremendous success in organizing in New York and growing

4) Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, p. 47

the Party chapter there. After bail was set at \$100,000 each (approximately \$670,000 in today's money), a national effort to free them got underway and people from all over the country rallied to support them.

The successes in NYC and the rise to national prominence of the Panther 21—as well as other leaders like Fred Hampton and Bobby Rush in Chicago, Ericka Huggins in New Haven, and Elmer “Geronimo Ji-Jaga” Pratt in Los Angeles—were good things for the Party. New political leaders were coming forward across the country and people were rallying to support them. **This was particularly important because with the rapid growth of the Party there was an objective need for new leadership at multiple levels.** With a bunch of committed revolutionaries developing in the Party, it was definitely possible for Panthers to work through the variety of internal issues that they faced. They could have ironed out the details of coordinating on a national level and had numerous local leaders join the national-level leadership of the Central Committee.

*The Panthers were not systematic in promoting local leaders to the Central Committee and reorganizing the national structure of the BPP.*

The Panthers began this process when Fred Hampton was added to the Central Committee shortly before he was assassinated. However this process was scattered disorganized. The Panthers were not systematic in promoting local leaders to the Central Committee and reorganizing the national structure of the BPP. Their efforts were repeatedly cut short and eventually abandoned altogether. One of the final efforts to do so took place right after Huey was released from jail in 1970. He went on a tour around the country, and made plans to move the Panthers' national headquarters to New York



*The infamous 1969 police raid of the LA Panthers office. During this raid over 300 heavily armed police surrounded the office and arrested all the Panthers with the aid of the snitch Melvin "Cotton" Smith who planted illegal firearms in the office.*

City.

However, even this effort was marked by the growing East-West divide in the Party. Melvin “Cotton” Smith was sent by the Central Committee to prepare the new Party headquarters that was to be set up in Harlem on 127th Street. **He claimed to have expert knowledge of weapons and security, but was in fact an informant on the payroll of the FBI.** When he had previously worked in LA he had planted illegal weapons in the Panthers' office right before a police raid that helped the pigs frame people on phony charges. Cotton was also a drunk and, unsurprisingly, failed to follow through on the basic tasks of preparing the new Headquarters. Assata described how Cotton operated:

*“I visited the house of 127th Street many times over the next few months. Hard as I tried, I could not find one shred of progress. I came to the conclusion that Cotton was a big mouth and a drunk. But everybody kept telling me how hard he was working, so I figured he was working on something secret they had obviously decided not to tell me about.”<sup>5</sup>*

The reality was that Cotton was not doing any secret work for the Party. **He was just drinking, snitching to the pigs, and spreading rumors to sow distrust between the Central Committee and the New York Panthers.**

5) Assata, *Assata: An Autobiography*, p. 222



However, he used his connection to Huey to deflect any criticism of his work in New York. This led to big setbacks. For one, the new Headquarters were never completed, and so Huey and the rest of the Central Committee (who were mainly based in Oakland) never moved to New York. **This move would not have resolved all of the issues in the Party, but it could have gone a long way to overcoming the suspicion with which East and West coast Panthers had begun to view each other.**



*BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard speaking at the Lincoln Memorial in 1970. Hilliard's role as leader of the Party was questionable at best, given his fundamental confusion about revolutionary politics.*

Cotton's rumor mongering also contributed to the growing paranoia and distrust in the Party. At this time the FBI's COINTELPRO was in high gear and rumors were flying around. The most destructive were the stories—spread by the FBI and their snitches—that Panthers were being secretly killed by other Panthers. This fed into an air of extreme distrust, and left many comrades doubting each other. Despite this air of mistrust, Cotton was able to use his personal connection to Huey to deflect any and all criticisms of his suspicious and drunken behavior. **Cotton's ability to shield himself from criticism represented a deep issue in the Party that went beyond just snitches.** It wasn't just local leaders and emissaries who got their positions in the party due to their personal connection with Huey. Some people in high positions in the BPP were also there in large part due to their personal friendship with Huey P. Newton.

For example, David Hilliard, the Panthers' Chief of Staff, was childhood friends with Huey. The fact that one of Huey's childhood friends was a high-ranking member of the Party was not a problem by itself. **However, Hilliard was actually pretty incompetent, and did not understand very basic aspects of what the Panthers were about.** In Hilliard's autobiography, *This Side of Glory*, he described how one night, drunk and frustrated with some setbacks that the Panthers were facing, he walked out of his home and took a "potshot" at a passing

cop car. He called this venting "the madness." Mumia explained the larger significance of Hilliard's drunken actions:

*"While this behavior perhaps reflects the actions of a drunkard, therefore somewhat mitigating the charge, it raises justifiable questions about his ability to effectively manage the affairs of the nation's largest Black revolutionary organization. It suggests that Hilliard was in over his head. Shortly thereafter, Hilliard is counseled by Seale, who explains to him the rudimentary notion of the revolutionary process as an extended one, and not an emotional or instantaneous response to external stimuli. David listens as if it's the first time he has heard such ideas. Clearly, then, while Hilliard may have held Huey's trust and his affection, it is doubtful that he possessed the managerial or interpersonal skills necessary for a group composed of young, angry Black people who wanted to fight to bring freedom to their people. That didn't mean, of course, that David was somehow stupid or didn't learn the lessons needed to do the task. It means only that Hilliard's prerequisite for the job was his deep, personal loyalty to Huey, and while that served Huey's interests, it did not necessarily serve the interests of a growing, changing Black revolutionary political party."*<sup>6</sup>

Hilliard, despite his shortcomings and limitations, was not a snitch or a provocateur. However, he was certainly not a capable leader.

6) Mumia, *We Want Freedom*, p. 221-222



*Huey P. Newton during a 1968 interview while he was on trial. The time that Huey spent in jail changed him because he was subjected to solitary confinement and other forms of torture.*

His loyalty to Huey was his main qualification, and this was a serious problem. This problem is even more evident in the case of people like Cotton, who professed loyalty to Huey as a way to deflect criticism of their actions. **Had Cotton and others like him been subject to an honest evaluation and serious criticism it would have at least become clear that they were not following through on important political tasks, such as preparing the new organizational Headquarters.** This sort of criticism could have eventually even revealed their underlying dishonesty and the fact that they were snitches.

It's important to see that these problems with individuals like Cotton, Bey, and Hilliard went beyond the individuals themselves. They were symptoms of deeper problems in the Black Panther Party as a whole. What's more, Huey's decisions to send people like Cotton and Bey to "watch over" local branches were often fueled by misinformation from the FBI. These fake letters often claimed to come from members of BPP branches and spread lies about how the local leadership were undermining Huey, deviating from the Party's line, using drugs, and so on. **Had local leaders been promoted to the Central Committee, the poisonous lies the FBI was spreading to the Central Committee would not have been nearly as effective, because the national leadership would have had a better understanding of the local situations.**

There was also a broad need for increased democracy between the local branches and the national leadership. **However, there was a broad perception among the Panthers' that Huey was their unquestionable leader, and this was reinforced by people like Bey and Hilliard.** Huey played a really positive role in founding the Panthers and developing the basic aspects of their ideology. However, like anyone, he also had his shortcomings. Some of these got worse after his time in jail, where he faced solitary confinement and other forms of torture.

It's important to understand how much being in prison impacted Huey. **When**

**he came out he was not only paranoid, but also struggled to communicate with people in ways that had come naturally to him before.** Being in jail in general, and being tortured in particular really can mess with people. Some people can come right out of jail after being tortured and jump right back into revolutionary organizing, but this is generally not the case. Torture messes with people's minds, and some people even break when being tortured and become informants. Others have difficulties jumping back into full time organizing and leadership roles. **That's why many revolutionary organizations around the world today generally don't let comrades fresh out of jail take up positions of leadership right away.** It's important to have them transition gradually back into political work, both to make sure that they haven't turned into snitches and also to ensure they can handle the stresses of leadership after the grueling experiences of prison.

**In particular, Huey had become paranoid after being in jail.** The Party had also grown and the vast majority of members were strangers to him. When Huey was arrested in the Fall of 1967, he knew every single member of the BPP; when he was finally released from jail in the Spring of 1970, the Party had grown exponentially. Bobby Seale was also in prison at this time and Eldridge Cleaver was in exile. The FBI's rumors and the fake letters that they sent to Huey fed into his paranoia.



*Big Bob Bey (left) and Huey (right) at Huey's retrial in 1971. After getting out of jail, Huey increasingly relied on unreliable people like Bey, simply because he had known them for a long time.*

*water, rather than question his decisions on matters involving Party discipline. They became, not his comrades, but his emissaries, instruments of his will. It was to men such as these that the term 'Huey's Party' had meaning and verity.”<sup>7</sup>*

**Mumia’s analysis shows how the individual leadership of Huey P. Newton, which was so crucial in forming the Party, eventually became a problem and hurt the Panthers.** This doesn’t mean that Huey should have been kicked out of the Party at this point, or that he shouldn’t have been a leader. Rather, what was needed was a form of collective leadership by the Central Committee and the local leaders. This way, individual shortcomings could have been overcome, and mistakes—like Huey’s tendency to value comrades’ personal loyalty over their leadership skills—could have been avoided. **A good collective approach, where others had the ability to openly disagree with Huey without being seen as treasonous, would have gone a long way to combat the paranoia and distrust that was growing in the Party at the time.**

*What was needed was a form of collective leadership by the Central Committee and the local leaders.*

He responded by sending Panthers that he knew—like Bey and Cotton—to “fix” the issues with other branches. There were a number of different problems in BPP branches across the country. Some had failed to develop community programs, others had issues with drug use and drinking among the membership, some had issues with patriarchy, and other things as well. **However, these issues could not be solved by Huey sending those loyal to him to other chapters.** Instead, these emissaries—selected more for their professed loyalty to Huey than for their political clarity—created far more problems than they solved. Mumia describes how this played out:

*“Huey tended to make leaders of those people that he knew from his pre-Party street life, his homies and friends. While these were undoubtedly people that he trusted, they often were people who were, quite frankly, ill equipped to handle the pressures and stresses of directing and managing an international organization.*

*“What appears to have happened is that guys whom Huey trusted tended to carry Huey’s*

However, distrust and growing paranoia was not the only issue that Huey faced after leaving prison. **After getting out of jail Huey’s new theoretical formulations became increasingly eclectic and academic.** Many common people and even Party members struggled to understand what he was saying, and after spending a lot of time in prison, Huey had difficulty speaking to people in a clear and straightforward fashion. He had lost touch with the people and because of the lack of a culture of comradely criticism in the Party it became increasingly difficult for people to voice these concerns without them being dismissed out of

7) Mumia, *We Want Freedom*, p. 221



*Reggie Schell speaking in Chicago in 1969 after the police murdered Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.*

hand.

**Huey was the founder of the Party and every Panther had mobilized to free him.** They looked up to him, and many got involved in the Party because of him. With Bobby in jail and Eldridge in Algeria, the Panthers hoped that Huey, fresh out of jail, would be able to lead them forward and help to resolve the issues that existed at the time. It was disorienting for many when Huey, who they knew only as a picture on the wall of the Party office, came out of jail and was so distant and academic.

Reggie Schell, the leader of the Philadelphia branch of the BPP, described the changes that came over Huey after he got out of jail and how these made it difficult for Huey to solve the problems that existed in the Party at the time:

*“I was out in California that summer when Huey P. Newton got out of jail, and I watched it when people from the community came up and talked with him, congratulated him for coming home and told him how much they missed him and supported him. And I saw that he couldn’t talk to them. **His conversation was gone, he was a million miles away from them**[...] You know, everyone was talking about turning the Party around. Internally there were certain things happening that left a lot of people across the country dissatisfied.*

*“There was drug use, there were problems at the top; and Bobby Seale was in jail in New Haven, Connecticut, and Eldridge Cleaver was outside the country [in Algiers] and couldn’t*

*return. We were hoping that Huey could turn it around, but when he came home we found that he wouldn’t or couldn’t do it, and the Party just started falling, people just started leaving it. The desire was gone.*

*“It’s not a question of individuals, really. **But the people at the top, the Central Committee of the Party, they were the ones that we looked up to, the ones that inspired us to do more, and when we couldn’t get that inspiration any more, then chapters and branches across the country just started to fall apart.**”<sup>8</sup>*

Schell’s comments help to clarify how deep the issues in the Party were. *There was a crisis of national leadership, and on the local level many branches were disorganized, lacked revolutionary discipline, and*

*had issues with some members drinking or using drugs.* However, there was also an incredible amount of positive work that the Party was doing. There was a need for the Party to sum up the lessons from their successes and mistakes, and to develop a plan to address their shortcomings.

*If this approach had been taken, it would have been possible to rectify the mistakes they were making, and popularize the successes that the Party had.* Branches that were struggling more could have learned from those which had overcome similar difficulties. Local leaders could have been promoted to the national leadership of the Central Committee. Better and more secure channels of communication could have been established between branches of the Party.

### **Differences on Revolutionary Strategy in the BPP**

Unfortunately this did not happen. Instead, the FBI’s fake letters and COINTELPRO efforts continued to take their toll and exacerbate existing issues in the Panthers. **The divide between the local and national leaders deepened and Huey and Eldridge grew increasingly suspicious of each other.** This suspicion was fueled by the FBI’s meddling. For example, Eldridge, who was in exile in Algeria, received a series of letters forged by the FBI which claimed that Huey was disparaging Eldridge and living off the backs of the hard working rank-and-file Panthers.

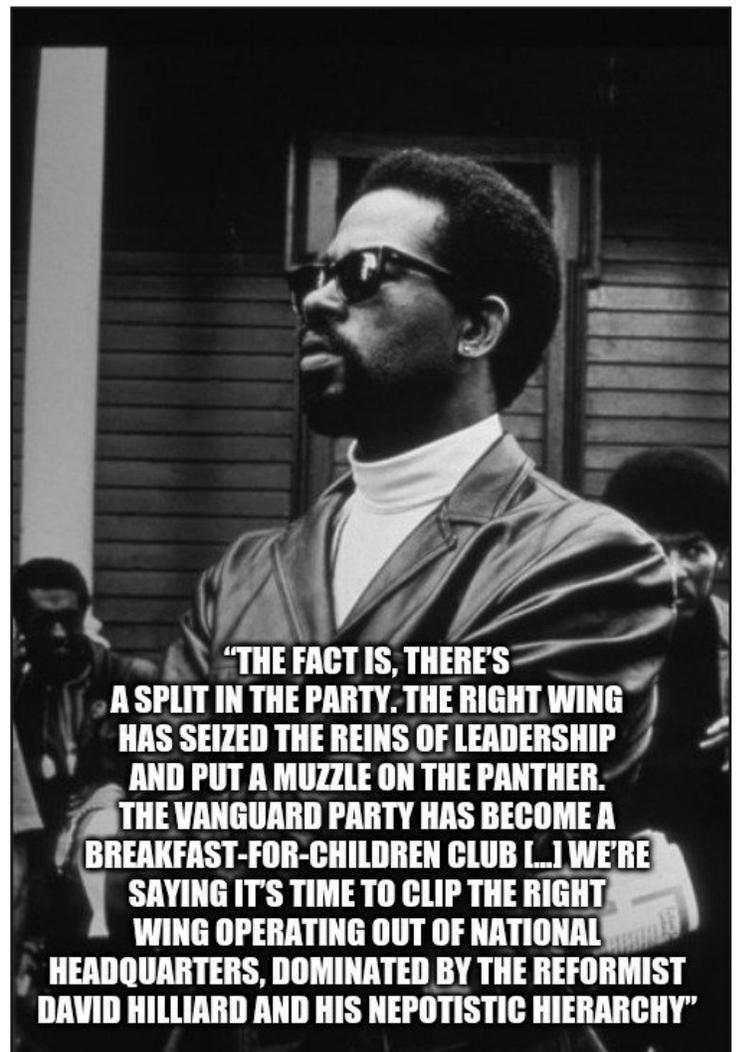
8) Reggie Schell, “A Way to Fight Back”, in *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee*, p. 61-62

These letters also stroked Eldridge's ego, claiming that he, and not Huey, should be the leader of the Party. In an internal memo in December 1970 the FBI instructed its agents to, "write numerous letters to Cleaver criticizing Newton for his lack of leadership. It is felt that, if Cleaver received a sufficient number of complaints regarding Newton it might...create dissension that later could be more fully exploited." The FBI knew that if it could stoke divisions between these two, this could lead to a split in the Party. **However, it's important to see that the FBI was only able to drive this wedge between Huey and Eldridge because of preexisting disagreements between the two of them.**

Huey and Eldridge had long standing disagreements on politics and revolutionary strategy. While both agreed that there was a need for revolution in the U.S., the two differed on how to best achieve it. Eldridge drew on Che Guevara's idea of the *foco* or "focus of the revolution." **This concept is basically that a small number of armed revolutionaries need to work totally underground and engage in a series of guerrilla actions against the oppressors.** The idea was that these actions would inspire the masses to spontaneously rise up and topple their oppressors.

However, history has shown that this is not a realistic strategy. First and foremost, a powerful state like the U.S. has a whole series of repressive forces, from the police, to the army, the FBI, and more. A few guerilla actions and a spontaneous uprising are not sufficient to topple such a powerful foe. **Time and time again, the U.S. government has shown a willingness to deploy a large number of troops against the people, as they did in Detroit in 1967, in LA in 1992, and Baltimore in 2015, to name just a few incidents.** In each of these cases unorganized rebellions, although incredibly positive, were unable to overcome the repressive force of the U.S. government.

What's more, small guerilla actions against individual oppressors, as carried out by the Weathermen and the Black Liberation Army, did not generally inspire the masses of people to rise up. **Instead, these actions tend to either scare people off, or politically disarm them because the masses falsely believe that the guerrillas can take care of all of their oppressors.** Also, when these sort of organizations carry out actions like assassinating police officers, or kidnapping politicians, it tends to bring the state down hard on them, and also open the door for the government to pass a whole

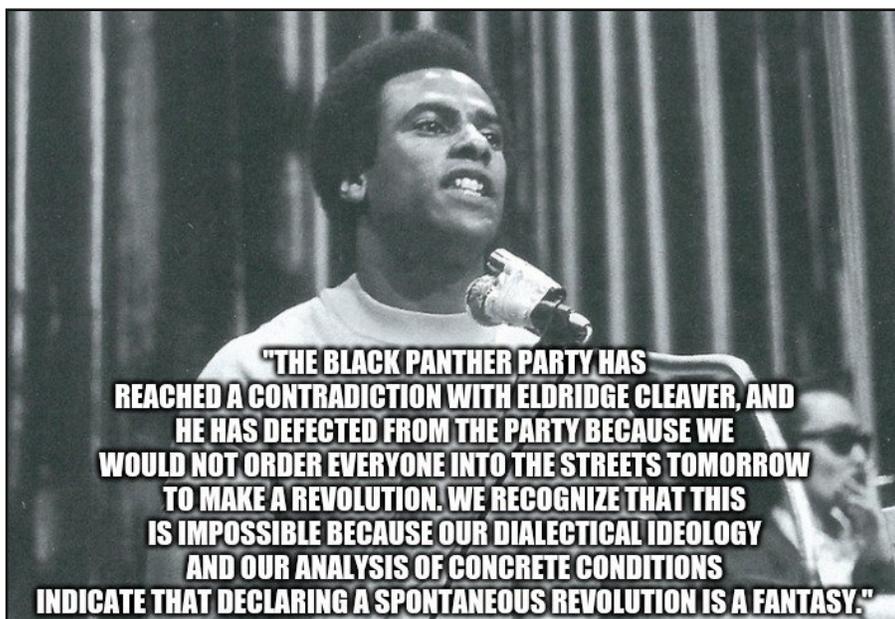


*Despite his shortcomings Eldridge Cleaver saw that Huey and others were pushing the Party in a reformist direction.*

new series of repressive laws and protocols.

Historically Marxists have called these sort of guerilla actions by a small group of people "left"-adventurism. **The tactics, while they may seem very radical and "left," are actually based on the fantasy that a small group of guerillas can defeat the state in single combat.** This doesn't mean that there is no basis for guerilla warfare in revolutionary politics, but the specifics of where and how it is carried out matter a great deal. A small band of revolutionaries in isolation from the masses of people will have very little impact. In countries like the United States waging guerrilla warfare against the government is a suicidal prospect, unless the country is in a real state of crisis and disarray with mass uprisings already going on. The U.S. army can be deployed anywhere in the country in a matter of hours, and will easily crush a small band of guerillas.

There are many places around the world



*Despite moving in a reformist direction, Huey and the West Coast leadership understood that Cleaver's strategy would not lead to revolution, only crackdowns and arrests.*

today where it is possible to take up guerilla warfare. This is possible in countries where the majority of the people live in the countryside and where there is not highly developed transportation infrastructure. These are places like India and the Philippines, where revolutionaries have been waging successful guerrilla wars against the government for decades. However, even there their strategy is not one of *focoism*, where a small band operates at a distance from the masses. **Instead, revolutionaries must "swim among the masses like fish in water," and work closely with them to win their support and participation in the revolution.**

While Huey was initially somewhat sympathetic to *focoism*, and to Che Guevara as a political figure, he emphasized that the Party's primary role was to educate and organize people. **This way, it would be possible to overcome the inherent weakness of a spontaneous uprising in one city, and instead coordinate a nation-wide revolution.** Huey had seen how the rebellion in Watts in 1965 had been crushed, and how the police had used it as an excuse to arrest over 4,000 black people. He knew very well that spontaneous uprisings were incapable of toppling the U.S. government by themselves.

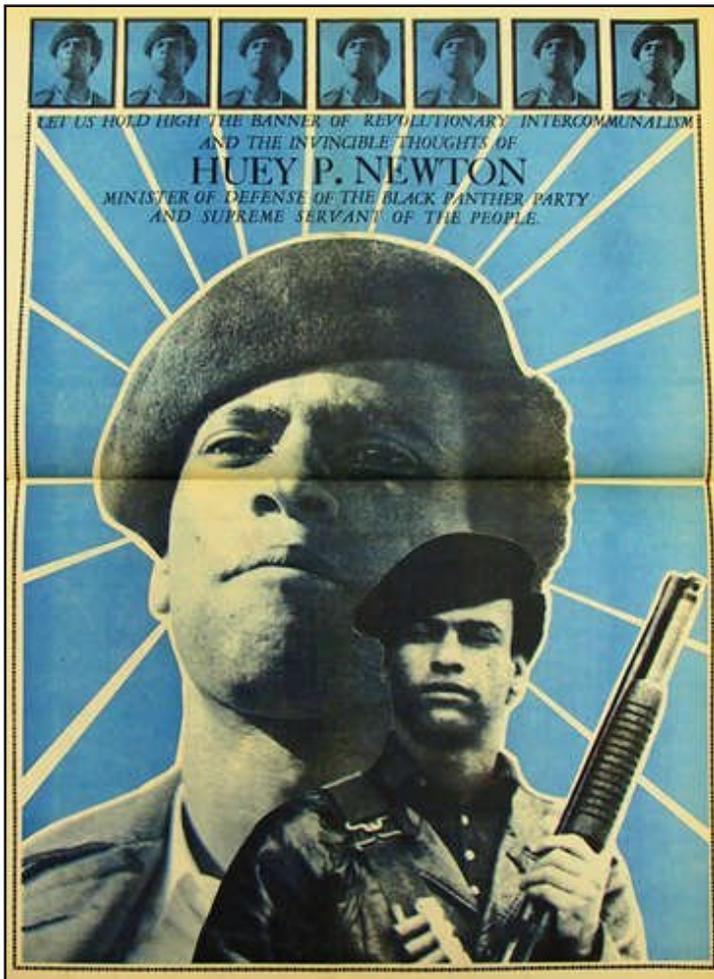
This is why, in his July 1967 article *The Correct Handling of a Revolution*, Huey wrote "The main function of the party is to awaken the people and teach them the strategic method of resisting a power structure which is prepared not only to combat with massive brutality the people's

resistance but to annihilate totally the Black population." Huey also emphasized that, "The main purpose of the vanguard group should be to raise the consciousness of the masses through educational programs and other activities. The sleeping masses must be bombarded with the correct approach to struggle and the party must use all means available to get this information across to the masses."

In the same article, he also criticized the idea that the Party should start off as a completely underground organization (as would be needed to engage in *focoism*), and highlighted the difficulties that arise if the masses of people do not know of the Party. **How else, except through serious and patient work**

**among the oppressed, is it possible to win their confidence?** Implicit in this article was a criticism of Eldridge Cleaver's push for the Panthers to immediately adopt a policy of urban guerrilla warfare. Huey had no pacifist illusions that it would be possible to overcome the oppressors just by non-violent means, but he also understood that the Panthers would be quickly isolated from the masses and destroyed if they adopted the tactics of guerilla warfare at the time. Huey did remain somewhat theoretically sympathetic to the idea of *focoism* for a time, but he consistently opposed Eldridge's efforts to start urban guerilla warfare.

**However, after getting out of jail Huey announced new theoretical formulations which on the one hand more clearly rejected the strategy of *focoism*, but on the other hand were increasingly eclectic and academic.** It was not a coincidence that around this same time, Huey also began to advocate more openly reformist politics. All of this was wrapped up in a theory Huey called Revolutionary Intercommunalism. His basic argument was that the U.S. government controlled the whole world, that nations and even states had ceased to exist, and that there were only communities. From this incorrect conclusion, Huey argues that it was possible for communities to "delink" from capitalism and become independent revolutionary societies. While Huey claimed this was an extension and application of Marxist-Leninist theory, it clearly violated some basic lessons of this theory.



*It was not a coincidence that as the BPP began to promote the theory of intercommunalism, it also increasingly adopted a cult of personality around Huey.*

For examples, the Marxist theory of the state holds that the state exists because of class contradictions, and that while it may present itself as a neutral entity serving the whole society, the state in fact serves the interests of a particular class. As Lenin put it, “*The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms.*” Under capitalism, the state serves the capitalists and oppresses the workers and other poor people. The irreconcilability of this contradiction means that the only way to resolve the contradiction between the capitalists and the working class is through revolution. To carry out the oppression of the working class, and prevent a revolution, the state needs a whole series of institutions, including courts, police, the army, a legal system, and so on. Friedrich Engels—Marx’s close friend and collaborator—argued that the state’s power “consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of

coercion of all kinds.”

So, given that capitalism still existed in the United States (and still does today), and the various repressive and coercive institutions also had not been abolished, it is not clear why Huey concluded that “the non-state has already been accomplished” in the U.S. and around the globe. **It seems strange that, after spending three years navigating the courts and the prisons (two major institutions of the U.S. state), Huey would conclude that the state no longer existed.** This conclusion not only contradicted the basic aspects of Marxist-Leninist theory, but also Huey’s own direct experiences!

What’s more the experiences of Watts, Detroit, and a whole series of other uprisings in the 1960s, showed that the U.S. government was not willing to let poor communities determine their own destiny. Instead, when people rose up against their oppressors, huge amounts of military force was deployed to crush these uprisings. **Given this, it should have been clear to Huey that “delinking” would not be feasible, simply because the communities in question were kept as part of the U.S. not only by economic ties (i.e. cities needing food from the countryside), but also through repressive force.** In short, without overthrowing the government, it’s not possible for people to establish a revolutionary society. Any individual communities, or even whole cities which try to do this, will be crushed by the police and military.

Huey’s argument for Revolutionary Intercommunalism seemed to be based on his idea that because the U.S. had developed into an empire, nations had ceased to exist. In this formulation he also conflates nations and states. As he put it,

*“The United States, or what I like to call North America, was transformed at the hands of the ruling circle from a nation to an empire. This caused a total change in the world, because no part of an interrelated thing can change and leave everything else the same. So when the United States, or North America, became an empire it changed the whole composition of the world. There were other nations in the world. But ‘empire’ means that the ruling circle who lives in the empire (the imperialists) control other nations. Now some time ago there existed a phenomenon we called—well, I call—primitive empire. An example of that would be the Roman Empire because the Romans controlled all of what was thought to be the known world. In fact they did not know all of the world therefore some*

nations still existed independent of it.”<sup>9</sup>

Huey’s argument is that once a nation is subsumed by an empire, it ceases to be a nation. This raises the question of what constitutes a nation. Generally a nation is understood by Marxists as a group of people who live in a given territory, and share a common language, culture, and economic life. This means that even if a people are conquered or occupied, they do not necessarily cease to be a nation. **For example, although the Palestinian people were conquered and colonized by Israel, the Palestinian people are still a nation, and still fighting for the creation of a Palestinian state.** Likewise, the people in Vietnam were still a nation, although colonized by the French, then the Japanese fascists, then the French again, and then the U.S. Even through all of these imperialist occupations, they never lost their shared culture, language, territory, and economic life. And eventually they were able to win liberation from U.S. occupation.

In contrast to this understanding of nations, Huey argued that *“if a nation cannot protect its boundaries and prevent the entry of an aggressor, if a nation cannot control its political structure and its cultural institutions, then it is no longer a nation, it is something else.”* **This confuses the nation (the group of people) with the state (the institutions like the police, courts, Congress, tax system, etc.).** When a foreign power invades another country, they generally destroy or heavily modify the state system to suit their imperialists interests. For example, during the U.S. invasion of Iraq the Bush administration toppled Saddam Hussein, disarmed his army, and set up a military dictatorship called the “Coalition Provisional Authority” to rule the country. However, invasions do not always destroy the nation. For example, Iraqis still lived in Iraq even after the U.S. invasion. **Only when the invasion corresponds to a systematic extermination and mass displacement of nearly all the people in question, does the destruction of a nation take place.**

However, Huey’s eclectic theory ignored these basic facts and negates the possibility of a nation existing as soon as a people are occupied or invaded. Today many of the governments around the world are neocolonial, and they therefore serve the interests of foreign capitalists

9) Huey P. Newton, “The Correct Handling of a Revolution,” July, 20 1967, in *To Die for the People*, p.15-16



*Despite more than 70 years of Zionist occupation and settler-colonialism, the Palestinian people are still a nation and are still fighting for self-determination.*

and imperialists far and above the interests of their own people. These countries, while nominally independent and run by domestic leaders instead of foreign colonial governments, still primarily serve the interests of foreign countries and multinational corporations. **Under Huey’s theory this would mean that the people in these countries no longer are a nation.** And even in imperialist countries today, or the feudal kingdoms of old, the people were never in control of the political institutions, which only serve the interests of the elite. So here too, according to Huey’s theory, nations would not exist. Obviously this makes little sense.

**Given these confusing articulations, it was hard to see a way forward for revolutionary politics in the country.** The Panthers had previously called themselves Revolutionary Internationalists, meaning that they supported the international working class movement and the struggle for a global classless and communist society.



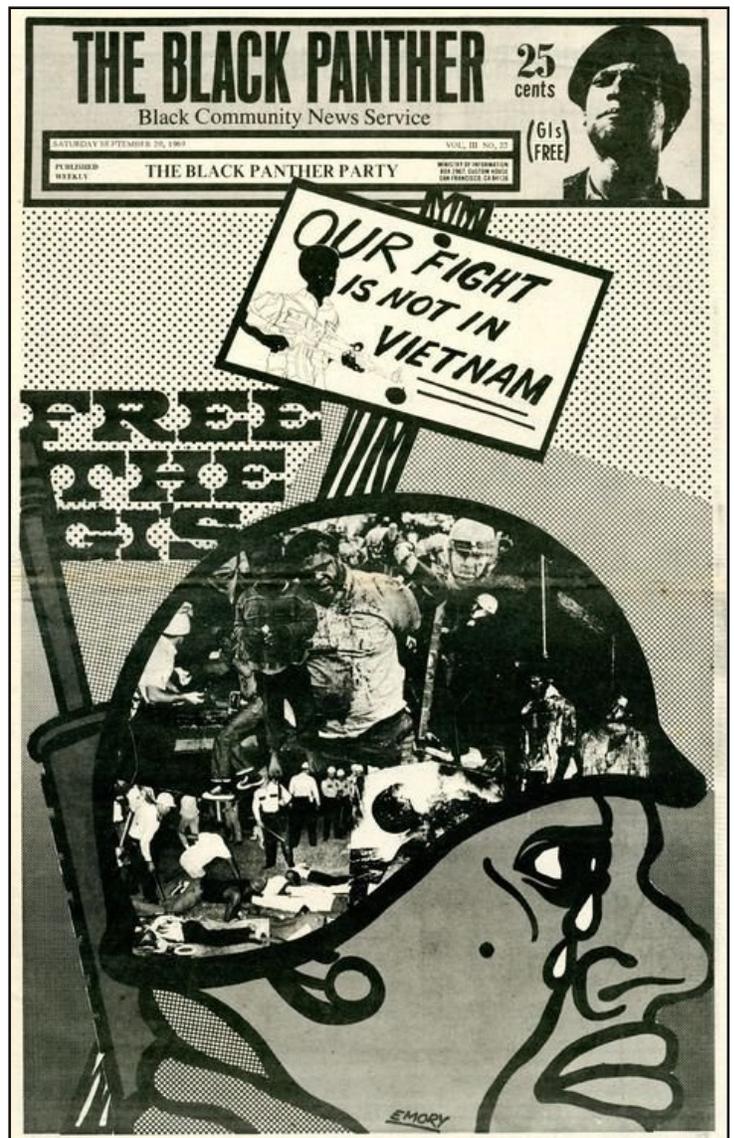
This entailed building up the revolutionary movement in the United States, fighting for socialism, and working closely with groups from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds as part of this effort. **It also meant lending all sorts of support to revolutionary movements around the world, as the Panthers did by linking up with the Palestinian Liberation Organization, supporting the Chinese Revolution, and actively encouraging Black soldiers in the U.S. army to defect and fight for the Vietnamese.** However, with the development of the new theory of Revolutionary Intercommunalism, Huey explicitly argued that it was impossible to have Socialism in the United States, and didn't really explain why. This left many Panthers confused about the direction of the Party.

Eldridge in particular was concerned that the shift to Intercommunalism would lead to reformist politics. These concerns had merit. A few years after the split, Huey recalled all the Party's branches to Oakland to support Bobby Seale's unsuccessful campaign to become Mayor. In part due to his isolation in Algeria, and due to his predisposition to focoism, Eldridge grew increasingly concerned about the overall direction of the Party. **Many of these concerns were valid, but the way Eldridge proposed to resolve them—namely through immediately initiating Urban Guerrilla Warfare—was mistaken.** When the BLA did eventually try to pursue this strategy it led to a massive crackdown and the death of numerous members.

*There was an objective need for the Panthers to make some changes, the question was just how things had to change.*

It may seem strange that there was such an intense political struggle in the Panthers over these questions. **One might be tempted to think that this conflict was primarily about personality and that Huey and Eldridge were just being short-sighted and egotistical.** Of course both of their personalities and shortcomings played a role in the split. However, it's important to see that this struggle was not simply a matter of conflicting personalities.

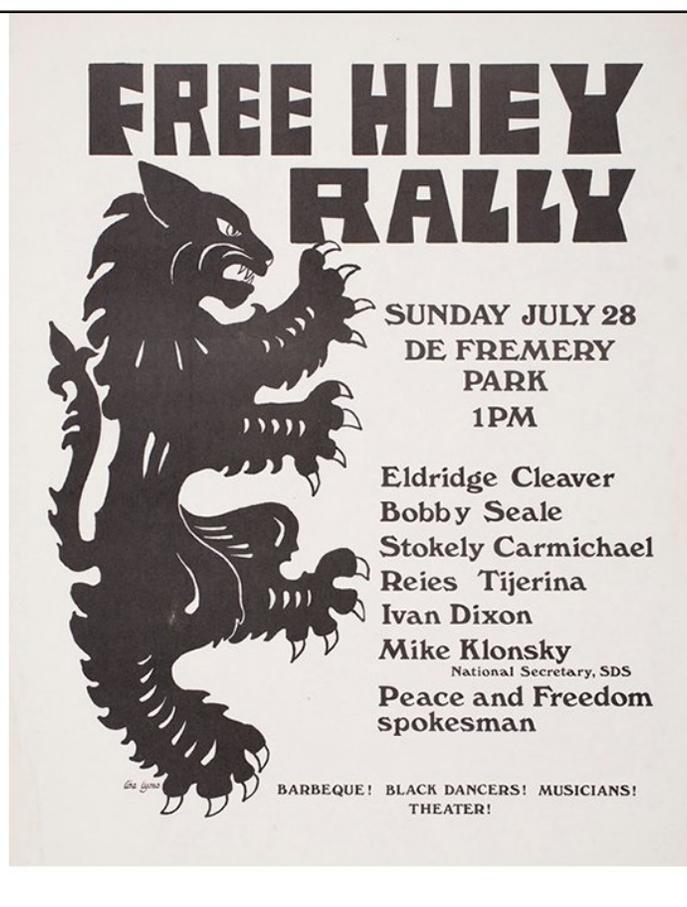
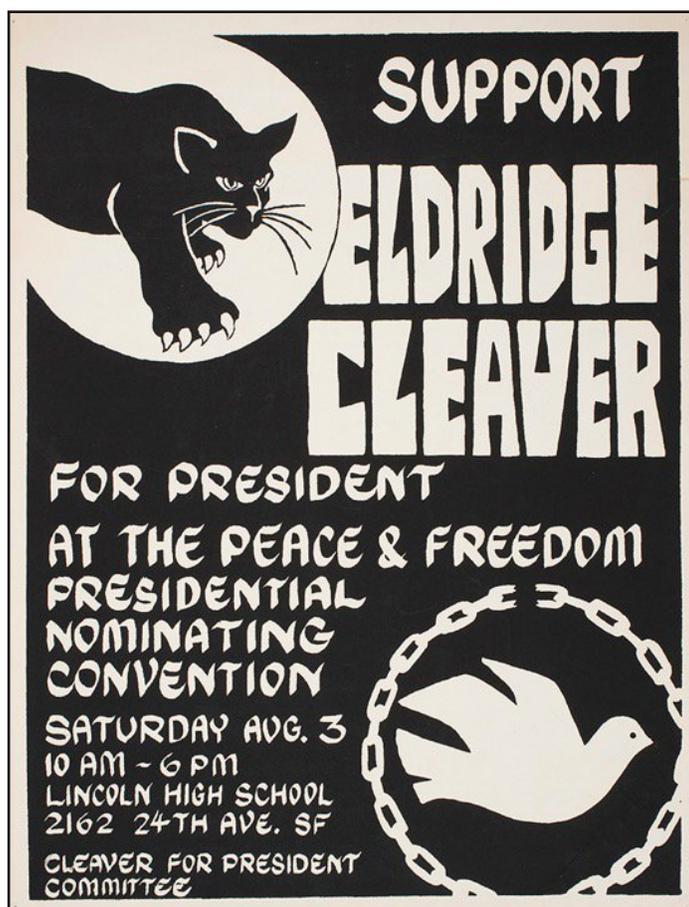
The reality is that the Panthers were at a major political crossroads. **They could not simply keep organizing in the way in which they had.** A number of issues had arisen within the Party that



*A BPP newspaper from September, 1969. For a time the Panthers practiced a Revolutionary Internationalist politics and supported revolutions around the world.*

needed to be resolved, and the U.S. government was targeting them with a massive campaign of violent suppression and espionage. There was an objective need for the Panthers to make some changes, the question was just how things had to change. Unfortunately, the strategies proposed by Huey and Eldridge both had major issues.

**Huey's shift to the theory of Intercommunalism meant an abandonment of revolutionary politics in practice and a shift towards academic reformism.** In effect, this was an attempt to avoid repression by adopting an opportunist and reformist politics which the U.S. state would view as less threatening. This strategy also called for Huey and the Central Committee to have greater authority over all local chapters, and



*A flier for a 1967 rally organized by the Panthers that brought together anti-war activists, radical students, white revolutionaries, Black Liberation organizations, and more. These sorts of events show what was possible if the Panthers had not fallen apart.*

ultimately led to the recall of all Panthers to Oakland to support Bobby Seale's mayoral campaign.

Eldridge's strategy was no better. To avoid suppression he advocated for the Panthers to go totally underground and take up guerilla warfare. He also pushed for a more decentralized leadership with the Party operating as a series of loosely affiliated cells. **In practice this led to the adventurist politics of the Black Liberation Army.** They launched a few sporadic and poorly planned attacks on the police, and only brought further suppression down on the Black Liberation struggle before the BLA ceased to exist entirely.

Neither Huey nor Eldridge's strategies were a real way forward for the Black Panther Party. **The former represented a shift to right-opportunism and the latter to "left"-adventurism, both of which ultimately liquidated the revolutionary potential of the BPP.** This liquidation was not inevitable, but there was a real objective need for the Panthers to adjust their strategy and rectify their mistakes and shortcomings. Unfortunately, they were unable to do so, and this theoretical conflict over political strategy ultimately exploded into

open public conflict and led to the split.

### Conclusion

In 1970 the Black Panther Party was at a crossroads. They had grown into a massive nationwide revolutionary organization with chapters in dozens of cities across the country. **The Party was the most advanced and militant organization in the Black Liberation Struggle, and they had won the confidence of the masses.** However, they also faced serious internal issues including problems with local chapters, lack of discipline and commitment among sections of the membership, problems with coordination and relations between national leadership in the central committee and local leaders, increased state repression, and more. **In order to go forward as a revolutionary organization they had to sum up their successes and failures and resolve many of these issues.** Unfortunately, the BPP was unable to do so, and growing conflict internal to the Central Committee and between the Central Committee and local leaders ultimately led to a split in the Party. In the next issue of the Red Star we will discuss the events of the split itself. ★



# Puerto Rican People's Power Shakes Colonial Government

by Khalil



*Over 500,000 march in the capital of San Juan to demand Gov. Rosselló's resignation. Huge demonstrations such as these show the real mass character of the movement.*

*Protests in Puerto Rico forced the resignation of the corrupt Governor Ricardo Rosselló. This recent movement signals a revival of people's movements and the struggle for independence from imperialism and colonialism on the island. Its important revolutionaries in the U.S. learn from this struggle and support the fight for self-determination in Puerto Rico.*

★ RED STAR

This past summer a mass protest movement erupted in Puerto Rico, taking the island by storm and forcing the resignation of Governor Ricardo Rosselló just fifteen days later. The popular demand for his resignation was sparked after several of his private messages were leaked, including misogynist and homophobic comments as well as jokes mocking the victims of Hurricane Maria. A large number of people—including many who had never protested before—took to the streets people quickly took to the streets demanding his resignation. But while these leaks were a catalyst for the movement, the protests were about far more than offensive remarks. **The protests were about the frustrations of the people of Puerto Rico with the policies and nature of the current colonial government, which has always served the imperial interests of the U.S. ruling class and never the interests of the poor and working masses.**

Rosselló—an MIT graduate born to a political dynasty—began his term as Governor in 2016. While in office, he oversaw austerity policies and “financial restructuring” which funneled money away from social services like education, disaster relief, and healthcare and towards allegedly repaying Puerto Rico’s debt. But instead of repaying debt,

these policies only increased the suffering of the Puerto Rican people and drove thousands more into poverty and destitution. **When Hurricane Maria hit the island in 2017, the Rosselló government did almost nothing to help the people recover from the disaster that killed thousands of people and left large portions of the island without electricity or means of transportation and communication.** On top of this, the Rosselló administration regularly faced corruption charges of graft, and stole from the people to increase the personal wealth of his inner circle while exacerbating the poverty of the masses of Puerto Ricans.

**Fundamentally, all these issues are related to a more basic problem facing Puerto Rico: The legacy and continuation of colonial rule by the United States since the island was annexed in 1898.** This recent mass upsurge is thus not isolated, but is a continuation of a long and vibrant history of the Puerto Rican people’s struggle against colonialism and domination by the U.S. imperialists, and by the Spanish Empire before them. In order to more fully grasp the significance of the movement last summer, we must first analyze the history of Puerto Rico.

## Puerto Rico: An American Colony

For 405 years, since the arrival of Christopher Columbus on the island in 1493, Puerto Rico was a colony of the Spanish Empire. The Spanish launched a genocidal campaign against the native Taíno people, used the island as a colonial military base, and set up plantations and a racial caste system. The masses of Puerto Rico resisted and rebelled against the Spanish at various times. Soon after the initial colonization, the Taíno people rose in rebellion in 1511, but were ultimately defeated. **The ethnic cleansing of indigenous people and brutality of the local colonial rulers in part led to a long ebb in organized people's rebellion, but could not suppress it forever.** People's struggles continued, but were largely disconnected and sporadic—mostly taking the form of rebellion at different plantations against the brutal exploitation faced by the workers in the cane fields.

However, after the success of revolutions in France, Haiti, and elsewhere, the tide began to turn. Inspired in particular by revolutionary movements against Spain in Mexico, Cuba, and South America, the Grito de Lares rebellion broke out in 1868. **The Lares revolutionaries attempted to win Puerto Rican independence through armed revolt.** They organized secretly, setting up underground organizations across the island and uniting large sections of society in a revolutionary and pro-independence movement. While this rebellion was cut short by Spanish repression, the Spanish colonial forces could not snuff out the people's revolutionary sentiment and desire to be free.

At the time, the Spanish were quickly losing their grip over their overseas colonies. Not only had they recently lost control of Mexico and South America, but the ruling class of the Spanish Crown was facing political and economic crisis at home. **This allowed rising imperialist powers such as the United States to use these divisions for their own benefit.** During the Spanish-American War in 1898, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were annexed and taken over by the U.S. imperialists.

In 1890, the United States had “closed the

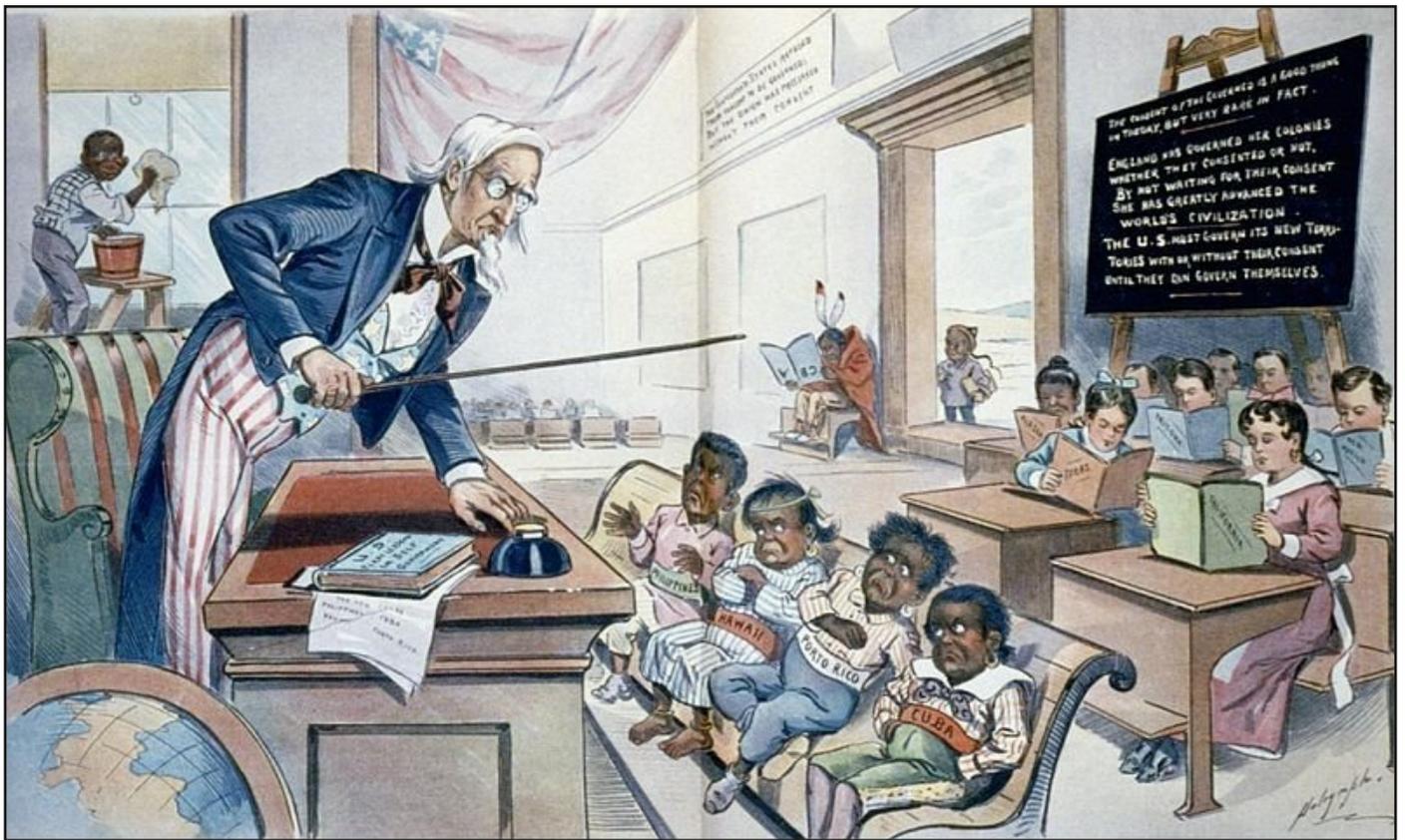


*A painting of the Grito de Lares rebellion, showing revolutionaries arresting Spaniards, taking down the Spanish colonial flag, and raising a flag of Puerto Rican independence. While short-lived, this rebellion was a catalyst for the rebirth of anti-colonial struggles on the island.*

frontier” and effectively completed its settler-colonial project, moving the few remaining indigenous populations into either rural reservations or urban slums. The capitalist class in the North decisively defeated the slave-owning plantation economy of the South in the Civil War. **The westward expansion led to a huge increase in the wealth of the railroad owners, the mine owners, the big landowners, the cattle-barons, and the financial institutions in this country, at the expense of working-class and poor people who had created all the wealth in the first place!**

This massive wealth accumulation, the emergence of monopolies, and the massive power of the banks and financial institutions signaled the start of American imperialism's race to re-divide the world and compete with other global powers. Spain's colonies were a nearby and easy target. The wealth of the monopoly capitalists had to be further expanded and accumulated, and the U.S. realized that the best way for them to do this was through conquest.

**During the Spanish-American war, the U.S. ruling class propaganda portrayed America as a savior to the former Spanish colonies of Cuba, the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico (which were subsequently put under U.S. domination).**



*Racist political cartoons like these from right after the Spanish-American War depict the colonized people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Hawaii as children who needed to be “civilized” by Uncle Sam. The blackboard in the back reads in part, “The U.S. must govern its new territories with or without their [the colonies’] consent until they can govern themselves.” White supremacist depictions of colonized people are still an integral part of how U.S. imperialism operates..*

The U.S. was depicted as the country which would spread freedom and democracy to these countries. In fact, the U.S. ruling class had no sympathy for the people of the former Spanish Empire. They simply saw Spain as a competitor, and the U.S. capitalists aimed to build their own colonial empire on the backs of the people of the world.

**Following the annexation of Puerto Rico, the U.S. moved quickly to ensure that the island’s land, labor, and resources were firmly in the grips of the U.S. monopoly capitalist class.** In 1899, the U.S. outlawed the Puerto Rican Peso (which was at the time equal in value to the American dollar) and declared it was only worth \$0.60 on the dollar. As a result, every Puerto Rican lost 40% of their money overnight. In 1901, the U.S. raised taxes on Puerto Rican farmers, forcing them to accept onerous loans from American banks. Because the interest on these loans was so high, farmers defaulted and lost their lands to the banks, who sold them to big agricultural corporations.

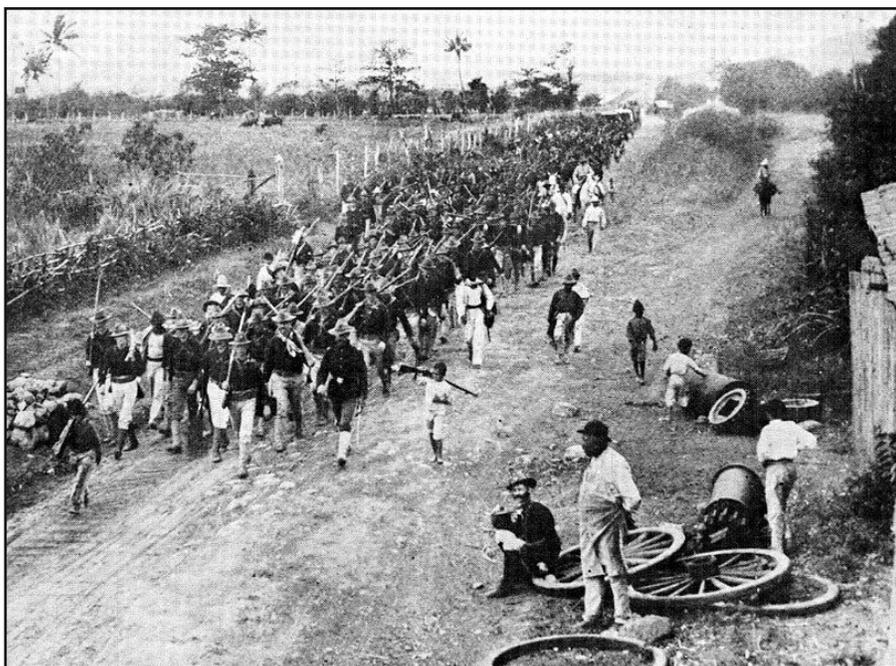
In 1920, the U.S. government passed the

Jones Act. The Jones Act stated that goods traveling between American ports must be made, owned, and shipped by U.S. companies. This benefitted American shipping capitalists and granted them the ability to charge monopoly prices between U.S. ports while forcing Puerto Rico and other colonies into economic dependence on the U.S. The Jones Act is still in place today. **As a result, it costs more to ship from LA to Hawaii than it does to ship from LA to Shanghai!**

*The U.S. ruling class had no sympathy for the people of the former Spanish Empire.*

Commodities coming from foreign countries, when being shipped to Puerto Rico, must first be dropped in Jacksonville and transferred to a Jones Act-compliant ship, jacking up the price by 200 to 400 percent! However, the Jones Act—while very significant—is just one U.S. policy which serves to keep the Puerto Rican





*A regiment of the U.S. military marching through Puerto Rico. After the Spanish-American War, the U.S. quickly set up its own military occupation of Puerto Rico.*

people under a star-spangled iron heel. The U.S. capitalist class has worked to profit from the exploitation and oppression of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is almost entirely reliant on imports for food, finished goods, medical supplies, and more—all from Jones Act ships. **As a result, the cost of living in Puerto Rico is estimated to be 13% higher on average than the mainland.** For example, Puerto Rico imports around 85% of its food, mostly from the U.S., and so food on the island costs twice as much as it does in Florida—this was all before Hurricane Maria even hit!

After it was seized during the war, the island was initially used for cash cropping in the interests of U.S. agribusiness, especially the American Sugar Refining Company (now Domino Sugar). By 1930, between 30-40% of the land was controlled by Domino Sugar and U.S. banks. **These banks also owned the postal service, railroads, seaports, and more in Puerto Rico.** After World War II, the U.S. ruling class shifted away from cash cropping and towards establishing Puerto Rico as a base of industrial production. This led to the destruction of most of the arable land in the country—which is now only 6% of the land—since it was no longer profitable for the U.S. elite to farm it.

Puerto Rican workers have gone from laboring in the plantations to laboring in the factories and sweatshops of U.S. corporations.

There was a major shift from agriculture-without-industry to industry-without-agriculture. To this day, many U.S. pharmaceutical, bio-tech, and weapons companies continue to take advantage of the fact that Puerto Ricans are technically American citizens but can be paid wages that are on average 30-35% less than mainland American workers. Currently, manufacturing accounts for 46% of Puerto Rico's Gross Domestic Product, compared to ~11% of U.S. GDP as a whole. **And after these commodities are produced, over 90% are exported to the mainland to be sold for the profits of the capitalists.**

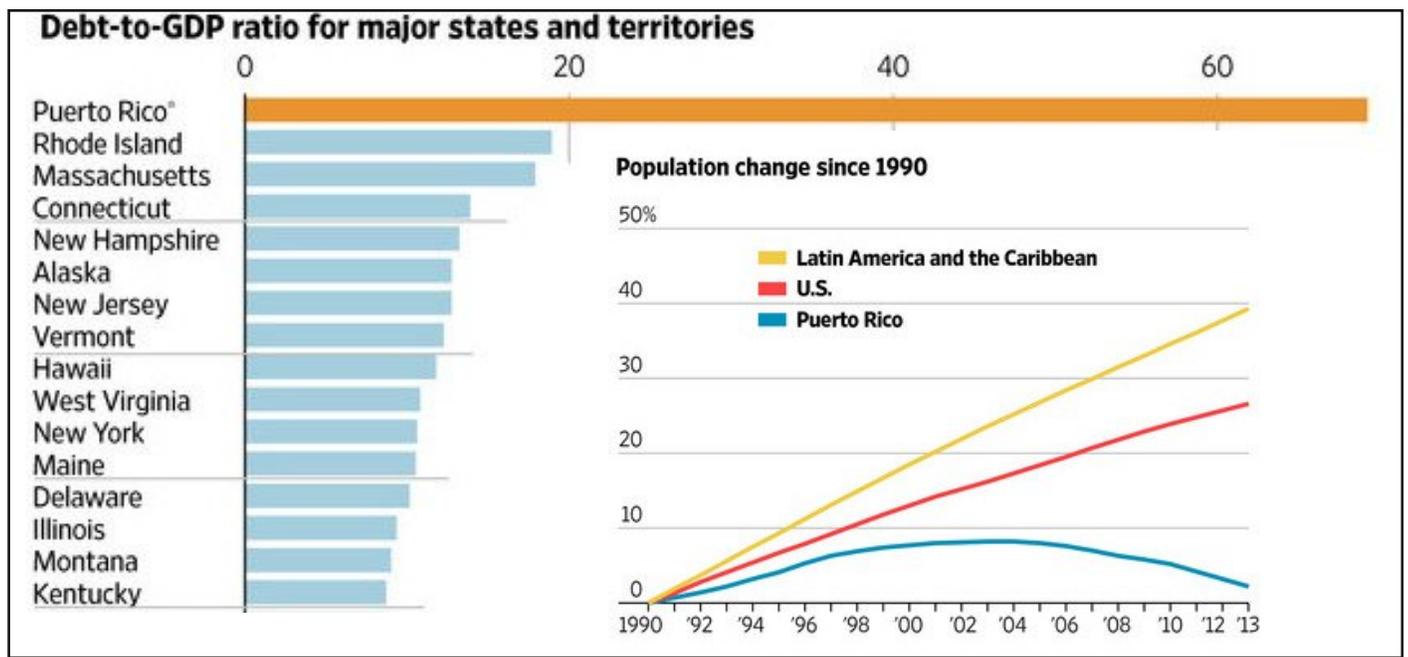
Puerto Rico's colonial status allows the Puerto Rican working-class to be exploited more intensely than the working-class of the mainland. **For example, the**

**median household income in 2017 of the poorest state in the U.S., West Virginia, was \$43,469. For Puerto Rico, the median household income in 2017 was only \$19,343.** Hundreds of thousands of people have been put out of work since 2008. 45% of the island's population is below the official poverty line.

By official unemployment statistics, the island has 10% unemployment. **However, using a different and more accurate statistic—the labor force participation rate, which measures the percent of adult and able-bodied people who work at least one hour a week—only 40% of the population works (compared to ~63% on the mainland).** Given these statistics, it is unsurprising that the majority of Puerto Rico's population relies on one form or another of government welfare in order to survive.

These meager welfare programs are by and large insufficient for meeting people's needs, but are often the only lifeline poor and working people have. **In the past few years, the Puerto Rican colonial government has pursued deeply anti-people austerity measures which gut these already weak welfare programs, education systems, and other social services.** All of this is done to ensure a larger and larger portion of the government revenue in Puerto Rico can flow into the pockets of U.S. capitalists.





*The debt burden in Puerto Rico far exceeds any U.S. state when compared to GDP. This has led to a large number of people fleeing the island due to the desperate economic conditions.*

## The Debt Crisis

Puerto Rico has long been a “good place to do business” for the U.S. ruling class, an ideal U.S. colony, where American companies are able to pay workers far less, avoid labor laws and environmental protections on the mainland that were won by people’s struggles, and use tax loopholes to further increase their profits. **This led to brutal exploitation and oppression of the Puerto Rican working class, and the draining of profits from Puerto Rico.**

Because a huge chunk of the wealth produced by workers on the island is pocketed by capitalists on the mainland, the colonial government has to borrow money from big financial corporations and banks on Wall Street in order to pay for its expenses. **This colonial relationship is at the root of the debt crisis that Puerto Rico is currently facing.**

Exploitative and oppressive U.S. policies laid the ground for the massive accumulation of debt in Puerto Rico. The Jones Act for example forced the island to pay exorbitantly higher costs for basic necessities, while massive tax breaks granted to American companies restricted the amount of tax revenue that the island’s government could collect.

Under the Clinton administration, subsidies for the Puerto Rican economy were cut. However, this only led to swift economic decline, since the Puerto Rican economy was—and remains—dependent on capital from the U.S. The government of Puerto Rico attempted to make up

for the loss of the subsidies by issuing bonds underwritten by big financial institutions like Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, and Santander Bank. **Essentially, this meant the Puerto Rican government was borrowing from the future from these banks, and promising to pay them back with interest—an impossible task given the fact that U.S. colonial domination of the island funnels most of the wealth created there into the pockets of U.S. capitalists.**

About one-third of all the value produced in Puerto Rico (roughly measured by Gross Domestic Product or GDP) is “repatriated” off the island, to the mainland United States. Repatriation means that the profits made from a foreign investment leave the country they were made in and go to the pockets of the foreign investors. In the case of Puerto Rico however, the “foreign investors” have the same American citizenship as the workers. **The commodities being sold by pharmaceutical, weapons, and other corporations are produced by Puerto Rican workers but the profits made in producing these goods are sent to the bank accounts of mainland American capitalists.**

Just between 2008 and 2017, the United States “repatriated” around \$334 billion dollars in profits. At the same time, Puerto Rico’s bond debt in 2017 was estimated to be \$74 billion. This means that just with the money American corporations drained from the island in a single decade, there would be enough to end Puerto



PROMESA CODEX

*The “Financial Oversight Board” established by Obama with PROMESA gave a group of Washington bureaucrats and Wall Street capitalists control over the Puerto Rican economy.*

Rico’s debt crisis four and a half times over! This “repatriation” of GDP is only one measure by which the American ruling class robs and exploits the people of Puerto Rico, and so the actual amount of profit generated on the island which never reaches the people is far higher.

Instead of giving up a percentage of their profits to end the debt crisis, the U.S. ruling class has driven through extremely anti-people austerity measures to force the people of Puerto Rico to pay for the crisis that the capitalists created! The Puerto Rican government started to push these austerity policies in 2006. The government began to impose higher sales taxes, attacked public sector labor rights, and laid off tens of thousands of public employees. **These attacks on the people did absolutely nothing to fix the debt—in fact, between 2006 and 2014 the debt grew by 64%!**

At the same time, the Puerto Rican government also continued to give massive tax exemptions to the U.S. ruling class. Public infrastructure, such as the electrical grid, was allowed to deteriorate and left severely underfunded. Unsurprisingly, the debt grew and grew, and in 2015 was admitted to be “un-payable” by the Puerto Rican government.

In 2016, then-President Obama signed into law a bill called the PROMESA Act, an acronym for “Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act”—which created a financial board to allegedly restructure the debt and

solve the economic crisis facing Puerto Rico. **Instead this oversight board intensified and deepened the austerity and attacks on the people.** It expanded the cuts to public universities, pensions, and state-run infrastructure.

This oversight board is an unelected group of seven politicians and bankers. The board is not based in Puerto Rico, but instead sits in Washington D.C. and unilaterally dictates the financial policies of the Puerto Rican government.

**Unsurprisingly, this board is popularly known as “la**

**junta” in Puerto Rico, a reference to the ‘juntas’ of right-wing military leaders that have run military dictatorships throughout Latin America.** Many of these military dictatorships enacted similar austerity policies against the poor as well.

It is important to see here that the junta of bureaucrats who now decide Puerto Rico’s economic future are not the root of the issue, but symptomatic of colonialism. The board is there to ensure that the subjugation and plunder of Puerto Rico by the U.S. capitalist class can continue. **The Puerto Rican people’s struggles against the corruption of Rosselló and the junta are thus part and parcel to the long history of resistance to U.S. imperialism—and imperialism in general.**

*With the money American corporations drained from the island in a single decade, there would be enough to end Puerto Rico’s debt crisis four and a half times over!*

### **Puerto Rican People’s Struggles Against U.S. Imperialism**

Almost immediately after Puerto Rico was annexed and taken over by the United States, sentiments for independence grew stronger and more organized. A series of rebellions and revolts in the late 1800s had pushed the Spanish Empire to grant the island concessions in the form of slightly more autonomy and a form of local self-government.

With the invasion by the U.S. during the Spanish-American war, Puerto Rico was put under U.S. military rule, with politicians and the governor appointed by the U.S. president. While the “self-government” granted by the Spanish was not a form of real freedom and independence, **U.S. occupation and an effective military dictatorship enraged the masses of people and rekindled the independence movement.**

American rule gradually ceded the people some degree of local control, in an attempt to convince people that the U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico was not colonial. For example, a body similar to the House of Representatives (called the House of Delegates) was set up in 1900. **But the real sham nature of this elected body was revealed in 1914, when**

**their unanimous vote in favor of independence from the U.S. was flatly rejected.** In 1917, the U.S. passed a law which made Puerto Ricans citizens of the U.S., saying it was a step towards statehood and being incorporated into the Union.

But in fact, **the purpose of this move was to subject Puerto Ricans to the military draft and force them to fight in World War I.** These actions by the U.S. government greatly increased popular support for the independence movement.

*Massacres and arrests like these were common in the efforts to suppress the independence movement.*

Several political parties, most notably the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, took shape during this time and organized for independence and self-determination. The U.S. responded with crackdowns and massacres. For example, in 1937 the PRNP organized a march in the city of Ponce in commemoration of the end of slavery in Puerto Rico in 1873.

**Despite the fact this march was permitted by the government, the permit was**



*The Ponce Massacre in Puerto Rico, in which the Puerto Rican Insular Police opened fire on a crowd of peaceful protesters and supporters of the Nationalist Party, killing 19 and injuring at least 200.*

**revoked at the last minute and the police were sent in against the marchers.** They opened fire, killing 19 people and wounding some 200 more. Soon after, leaders of the PRNP were arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the U.S. government. Massacres and arrests like these were a common part of the efforts to suppress the independence movement. But while they held back the development of the movement in the short-term, they spurred many more people both in Puerto Rico and around the world to support the struggle for self-determination and independence.

After the U.S. shifted industrial production to Puerto Rico in the mid-1940s, huge numbers of people moved to the cities and began working in large workplaces. This allowed the revolutionaries in the country to organize much more effectively and involve a greater number of the masses in their activities. What started as a movement based mainly among the petit-bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and sections of the bourgeoisie began to take on a mass, working-class character. **The simmering anger against U.S. colonial rule by the Puerto Rican masses turned into a pressure cooker of resistance, and in 1950 this erupted into armed mass revolts against colonial rule.**

The U.S. had already taken steps to try and quell this rising resistance. In 1947, they allowed Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor instead of having a U.S. appointee. But this governor, Luís Muñoz Marín, was in fact a total comprador of the U.S. **Meaning that, while nominally being “independently elected”, he was beholden to U.S. interests and led a puppet government to serve the colonizers.** Like all governors since him, he was an agent of U.S. colonialism with a Puerto Rican face. Its no surprise then that Muñoz Marín played a major role in crushing the nationalist independence movement. In 1948, he signed a gag law which prohibited any organization against the government or the expression of anti-government sentiments.

**It was illegal to wave a Puerto Rican flag or sing a pro-independence song under this draconian law.** This increased repression led to even more of the Puerto Rican population to take a stand against the colonial rule. In 1950, the U.S. tried again to quell the pro-independence sentiment by introducing a bill that would turn the island into a “Commonwealth”—the official status of the island today. Commonwealth status only meant one real change: it gave Puerto Rico the ability to write its own constitution for local government on the island.

*With the deepening economic crisis, corruption of the Puerto Rican government, and disastrous effects of 2017 hurricanes, people’s struggles have seen a new wave of energy and initiative.*

However, it did not allow them to declare independence or decide their own future in any significant way. The political-economic system was and still is fundamentally in the hands of the United States capitalists.

The revolutionaries and independistas of Puerto Rico saw this clearly for what it was: an effort to maintain U.S. colonial rule. The PRNP in particular worked to coordinate armed uprisings



*P-47 bombers such as these were used to crush the people’s rebellion in Jayuya in 1950. News of the uprising barely reached the United States, and President Truman only referred to it as “an incident between Puerto Ricans.”*

against the colonial government in 7 cities, including San Juan, Jayuya, and Utuado. In Jayuya, revolutionaries led by Blanca Canales raised the Puerto Rican flag in defiance of the 1948 gag law, leading Muñoz Marín to declare martial law. The Puerto Rico National Guard, a branch of the U.S. National Guard, was sent in to crush the revolt. **P-47 bombers machine gunned the rooftops and destroyed large sections of the city, forcing the nationalists to surrender. The revolts in other towns were similarly put down by military might and massacres.** This setback

resulted in a big decline in the independence movement, although pro-independence sentiment remains popular.

With the deepening economic crisis, corruption of the Puerto Rican government, and disastrous effects of the 2017 hurricane, people’s

struggles have seen a new wave of energy and initiative. Hurricane Maria in particular devastated the island—over 3,000 were killed, most of the island was without electricity and roads to rural towns blocked by debris for months, and the people sunk into even more severe poverty. **Rural communities were left isolated, while hospitals in the towns and cities were over capacity and serving as extra space for the full morgues.**



*Hurricane Maria killed thousands and left many homeless and without food, clean water, or access to medical care. The U.S. government did almost nothing to help the people.*

mafia” was operating within his department, engaged in profit-making and graft scandals. He was promptly fired for bringing these allegations to the media, with administration officials saying he was not “loyal.” These corruption scandals have been the norm for Puerto Rico for generations. However, the increasing anger at the whole government—the pathetic response to natural disasters, the austerity, the corruption of the two-party system—laid the ground for the huge mass movement that came in July.

### **The July Protests & Their Relevance for the Mainland**

On July 11, 2019, an anonymous source leaked Telegram messages from Rosselló’s account, and on the 13th the Center for Investigative Journalism published nearly 900 pages of leaked texts. **The messages revealed open misogyny, homophobia, and a real hatred and contempt for the people.** Rosselló and other members of the administration discuss manipulating public opinion through social media troll networks, crack jokes about the victims of Hurricane Maria, and joke about shooting opposition politicians such as the mayor of San Juan. Rosselló was on vacation in France when the messages were published, and quickly flew back to Puerto Rico to try and save his already tarnished career. But the people were already gathered on the streets to demand his resignation.

Rosselló confined himself in the presidential palace—a 16th century Spanish construction called La Fortaleza (The Fortress)—while the masses poured onto the streets. **By July 17, over 500,000 marched through Old San Juan with the popular demand “¡Ricky Renuncia!” (Ricky Resign!).** The governor and his family attempted to win back support by visiting churches and women’s shelters, but to no avail. More and more members of the administration resigned, and the pressure of the

Instead of doing anything significant to alleviate the suffering of the people, the colonial government and the U.S. government continued to push forward austerity measures. The Jones Act was suspended to allow aid to enter, but this was reversed after only a week, keeping the prices of basic goods unaffordable. **Thousands of people have left Puerto Rico for the mainland due to the unbearable conditions, and rich capitalists have begun buying up buildings and land in cities like San Juan to gentrify and profit from tourism and speculation while the masses of Puerto Rico remain unemployed, unhoused, and unfed.**

*The government of Rosselló has also been tied up in a web of corruption scandals.*

The government of Rosselló has also been tied up in a web of corruption scandals. For example, in July it was uncovered that two of Rosselló’s agency chiefs—the Education Secretary and the Executive Director of the Health Insurance Administration—had been funneling some \$15 million in federal contracts to companies they had ties with. **Only a few weeks before this, the Treasury Secretary of Puerto Rico alleged on radio that an “institutional**

mass movement continued to grow. On July 31st, Rosselló announced his resignation.

The protest movement that brought Puerto Rico's government to its knees carries a lot of lessons for revolutionaries in the mainland United States and around the world. For one, it demonstrated the real power of the people. **While the opposition party supported aspects of the protests and stands to gain from the fall of their political rival, the movement was not one concocted or engineered by the equally corrupt and backwards opposition.**

It was a real mass movement that got hundreds of thousands of people actively involved in politics, many for the first time. **The movement rekindled demands for system change and self-determination, and ultimately showed people what is actually possible when people come together in struggle against their real class enemies.** Through a two-week long sustained mass rebellion, Rosselló's government was brought down.

It is important to see that what happened in Puerto Rico was not a revolution in the proper sense of the word—the next government to replace Rosselló's will not act in a fundamentally different way. **It will maintain the parasitic political, economic, and social relations the United States has with the island.** The police, National Guard, prisons, and other repressive tools of the state will act in much the same way towards the people when they fight back and rebel. The demand for self-determination will continue to be repressed and the country looted by U.S. capitalist vultures.

However, the movement has greatly increased the Puerto Rican people's fighting spirit. They are struggling for even greater gains—including eventually throwing off the shackles of American colonialism and establishing a really pro-people and socialist society. **This will ultimately require revolutionaries in Puerto Rico to assess the successes and failures of**



*The Spanish colonial-era palace La Fortaleza (The Fortress) in which the governor of Puerto Rico resides. While the politicians live in decadence, the majority of Puerto Ricans live in deep poverty.*

**people's struggles—both in Puerto Rico and globally—and seriously organize for revolutionary overthrow of the whole colonial Puerto Rican state.**

As revolutionaries and internationalists within the United States, we have a duty to support the people's struggles against imperialism all around the world, and support the development of principled revolutionary forces in every country. **What's more, since Puerto Rico is a U.S. colony, the histories of**

*It is important to see that what happened in Puerto Rico was not a revolution in the proper sense of the word—the next government to replace Rosselló's will not act in a fundamentally different way.*

**the working-class in the U.S. and the working-class in Puerto Rico are intimately tied together, and there is a need for revolutionaries and workers here to support the self-determination of Puerto Rico.** We have a common interest in the overthrow of not just U.S. imperialism (the direct oppressor of the people in the mainland and in Puerto Rico), but the entire system of capitalism, imperialism, and white supremacy.★



# Class Struggles in Hong Kong and Their Relation to Mainland China

by Smith and Alan



Over 2,000,000 people took the streets of Hong Kong on June 12, 2019 to protest against the extradition bill. A large section of the population has come together in the struggle to stop the imposition of Mainland rule.

*In Hong Kong millions of people have taken to the street to protest the imposition of mainland China's rule of Hong Kong. The protests have been ongoing for months. The Chinese government is looking to crackdown on the movement, and this raises major questions about the relation between the struggles in Hong Kong and mainland China.*

Over the past months the protest movement in Hong Kong has captured international attention. What started as a protest against an extradition bill has grown into a full-scale rebellion that challenges the very nature of Hong Kong's present existence and its relationship to the Chinese Government. **Protesters have mobilized against the city's incorporation into China and fought against the imposition of legislation which would subject them to the draconian oppression already ubiquitous on the mainland.** For a long time, Hong Kong has served as a refuge for rebels and dissidents within China. While the U.S. imperialist media generally focuses on the pro-U.S. dissidents in China (who are often funded and supported by the CIA), there are also many revolutionaries and working class activists who have had to flee mainland China and take refuge in Hong Kong.

This dynamic is representative of the complex and contradictory nature of the protest movement in Hong Kong. **While most of the U.S. and Chinese media—for different reasons**

**—have focused on the pro-U.S. groups and individuals in the protests, the reality is that many of the protesters are not looking for Trump or any other members of the U.S state to “liberate Hong Kong.”** Recent protests have involved increasingly militant confrontations with the police, and many in Hong Kong are now calling the movement “The Revolution of Our Times.”

**Since the restoration of capitalism in China in 1976, the government has pursued an increasingly brutal and repressive series of policies.** Many in Hong Kong understand that if they do not struggle now, Hong Kong will inevitably become subject to the same draconian and fascist laws and forms of surveillance that are prevalent on the mainland. While Hong Kong itself is not run for the people, and has many internal social issues and repressive laws, its incorporation into the Chinese political system will facilitate a massive crackdown and the implementation of a series of new repressive laws. However, it's important to see that the present rebellion in Hong Kong is not just against



the Chinese state but also against the politicians and financial elite of Hong Kong itself. Given all of these complexities, it's important to study the history of Hong Kong to better understand the present.

## A Brief History of Modern Hong Kong

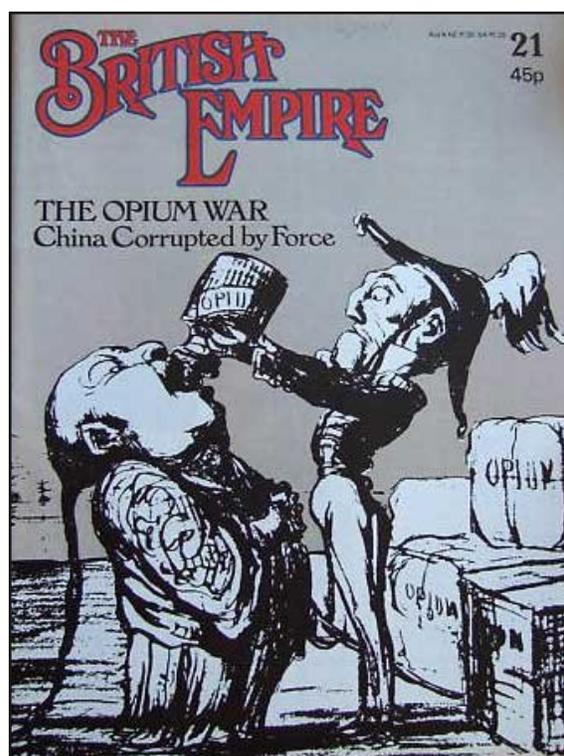
One major factor in the present situation in Hong Kong is its history as a British colony. Hong Kong first became a colony of Britain in 1842 as part of the treaty the British signed with the Qing Dynasty—which ruled China at the time—at the end of the First Opium War. **The British imperialists began trading the opium to China in the 1700s as a way to “balance their trade” with China and make China utterly dependent on British trade.** The British Empire implemented this policy because it was concerned about how much silver they were spending on Chinese tea. They smuggled opium into China and spread it through connections they had made with various criminal organizations. However, the Qing dynasty eventually banned the sale of the drug. While the dynasty was an oppressive feudal monarchy that did not serve the interests of the people, they took a stand against the British poisoning millions with drugs.

*[The British] smuggled opium into China and spread it through connections they had made with various criminal organizations.*

The British responded to the ban by attacking China outright, sailing their gunboats up the rivers to siege and bombard major cities. The British defeated the Qing and forced them to grant Britain a series of absurd concessions. For one, the Qing had to pay indemnities to the British for the cost of the war and the profits the British would have made if they had been allowed to sell opium during the ban. Even worse was that the British were granted territorial control of Hong Kong and extraterritoriality in cities throughout China. **The latter meant that the British were not subject to local laws in China, and could not**



be prosecuted by the Qing dynasty for crimes British nationals committed there, even for things like rape and murder. After the Second Opium War in 1860, the British got control of the Kowloon Peninsula as well, and in 1898 they also obtained a 99-year lease on the nearby “New Territories,” further expanding their control of the Hong Kong area.





A poster showing the British and a Chinese Warlord torturing a Chinese person involved in the independence struggle. After the massacre on May 30, 1925, posters like these spread across the country and inspired strikes and protests.

They pushed for this in particular because they were concerned that the Japanese imperialists—who were brutally colonizing the northeast of China—would eventually try to cut the British and other colonizers out and set themselves up as the sole imperialist power controlling China.

*The Chinese people were outraged at the brutality of the British and went on strike against them.*

The British were able to use Hong Kong as a base for their imperialist and colonial operations to dominate China and other places in Asia. **These extended far beyond the opium trade, into the full-scale plunder of China's**

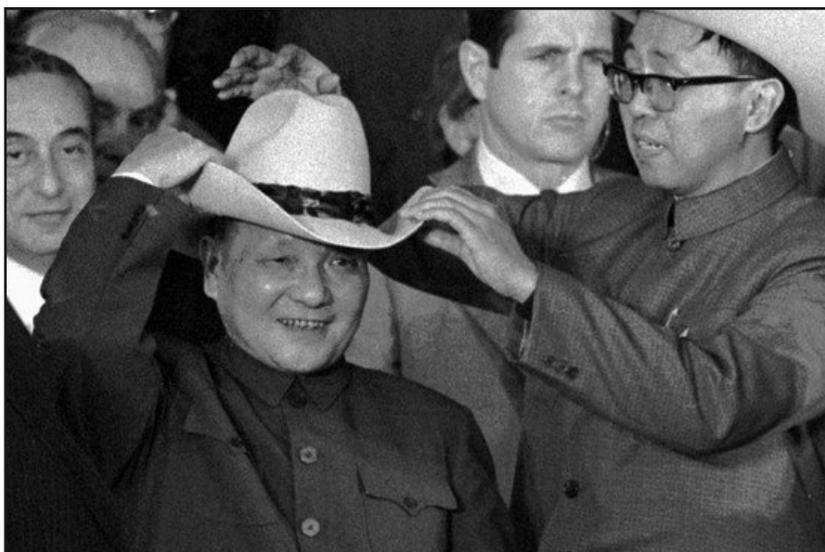
resources and the establishment of British run sweat-shops in which Chinese workers and children worked in near slave-like conditions. In many of these factories, the child laborers would be chained to the industrial machinery, work for twelve or more hours a day, and have to sleep on the factory floor under the machines at night. If children were injured in these dangerous conditions—say by losing an arm in an industrial accident—they would be cast out onto the streets and become beggars or just die. What's more, the Qing dynasty levied huge taxes on the peasantry and working people so it could pay back the indemnities to the British. This led to massive famines throughout the country, because after paying the taxes, the peasants would rarely have enough food to eat.

However, this brutal colonial plunder was also met with serious resistance. One particularly important incident was the Hong Kong strike of 1925-1926. On May 30, 1925 British police in Shanghai opened fire on a crowd of Chinese protesters who were calling for an end to the colonial domination of China by Britain and other imperialist powers. The Chinese people were outraged at the brutality of the British and went on strike against them. **More than 250,000 Chinese left Hong Kong and refused to work for the British.** This sent the economy of Hong Kong into a tailspin and the British had to bail it out in order to prevent many big British companies from failing.

### **The Chinese Revolution, the 1976 Counter-Revolution, and the Situation Today**

The 1925-1926 Hong Kong Strike is but one example in a long history of Chinese resistance to the British and other imperialists. **The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was eventually able to unite the many different streams of resistance into a mighty anti-imperialist river that swept all the imperialists out of China.** First, they defeated the fascist Japanese invasion which had pursued a policy of “Burn All, Kill All, Loot All” and had tried to turn the Chinese people into slaves of the Japanese Empire. Then, after WWII, the CCP defeated the imperialist-backed Chinese Nationalists (who were puppets of the Americans) and liberated all of China in 1949. However, the Nationalists fled to Taiwan, and the British retained control of Hong Kong.

After the revolution China went through a complex series of struggles that culminated in the Cultural Revolution. Although often critiqued as



*Deng Xiaoping dons a cowboy hat during his first visit to the U.S. in 1979. This infamous incident showed the world that China was intent on joining the world imperialist system.*

chaotic by both the U.S. media and the contemporary Chinese government, the Cultural Revolution was actually an incredibly powerful mass movement that aimed to continue the revolutionary struggles to transform Chinese society and bring about greater equality.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Mao and other revolutionaries in the CCP were concerned about the possibility of capitalist restoration in China. That saw that a series of Party members like Deng Xiaoping were trying to push for capitalism and to increase inequality in the society.

While many gains were made and inequalities overcome during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, it was ultimately defeated in 1976. After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping led a coup that resulted in the imprisonment of tens of millions.<sup>2</sup> Many of those detained were brutally tortured. **This sort of brutality was needed to overturn the gains of the socialist period and force capitalism down the people's throats.**

Shortly after this coup Deng Xiaoping uttered his infamous slogan that "to get rich is glorious." He also visited the U.S. and put on a cowboy hat as he signed business deals with big American companies that opened China up for business in the capitalist market. **Among his initial social policies were the reintroduction**

**of prostitution and drug addiction (which had been eliminated after the revolution), and the destruction of collective agriculture. This breakup of the agricultural communes left millions of peasants landless.** These are what are today celebrated as the "market reforms" of 1980s.

All of this helps to clarify the nature of the contemporary Chinese state. It is not and absolutely cannot be considered a principled, pro-people society. It is a capitalist country, not a socialist one. **The contemporary Chinese state was founded on a brutal counter-revolution that restored capitalism and slaughtered and tortured those who resisted.** While the ruling elite continue to call themselves the Chinese Communist Party and to

speak of socialism, this is little more than a cover for their capitalist policies and practices. Today China is a full-blown imperialist super-power that is going toe-to-toe with the U.S. in the political and economic spheres of competition. However, the revolutionary history and culture is not forgotten by the masses of people. **Of all the imperialist countries in the world, China has by far the biggest and most militant working class movement.** Continuous strikes throughout the country have shaken the government, and in response the government has cracked down time and time again. Recently they have rolled out a system of mass surveillance even more extensive than in the U.S.

The handover of Hong Kong by the British to Deng Xiaoping's government was itself a sign of the rising power of China. **First, Deng maneuvered to ensure that the government in Hong Kong and the people of Hong Kong had no say in the negotiations.** Then he threatened to invade Hong Kong unless the British promised to hand it over at the end of the 99-year lease.

While the British initially tried to hold on to Hong Kong, they eventually folded. In 1984 British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher agreed to the Sino-British Joint Declaration which stated that the British would hand over control of Hong Kong to China in 1997. The Declaration also specified that Hong Kong would be governed by China according to a "One Country, Two Systems" policy and that the way of life in Hong Kong would not be changed until 2047.

1) For an indepth analysis of the Cultural Revolution, see the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Revolutionary Study Group's document on the topic: <https://bit.ly/344OxFI>

2) See *Paris Commune in Shanghai* by Hongsheng Jiang: <https://bit.ly/35udBWD>

Given the present nature of the Chinese government many in Hong Kong are worried about their city's eventual incorporation into the Chinese political system. For a long time, Hong Kong has served as a refuge for political dissents and revolutionaries from mainland China. People who would be arrested, tortured, or killed in China have fled to Hong Kong, where the lack of an extradition law has allowed them to avoid incarceration. **While some of these people are U.S. lackeys funded by the CIA, there are also many trade unionists, communists, and revolutionaries who have fled the mainland to Hong Kong.** These people often link their struggles to the legacy of revolutionary struggle in China, and have few illusions about the Chinese Government.

For example on May 16, 2018 Hong Kong's Mao Zedong Thought Study Group organized a several hundred person march and meeting to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the start of the Cultural Revolution. The demonstration included not only people from Hong Kong, but also those from mainland China. In a speech at the meeting, Chen Hongtao, editor of the publication *Red Digest*, stated:

*“After Chairman Mao passed away in 1976, the capitalist roaders within the party launched a coup. After the full restoration of the capitalist class, followers of Chairman Mao were purged and suppressed, the laboring peoples lost their power to be masters of their country, and Cultural Revolution Thought suffered total official renouncement. This has caused those seated here—many supporters of Chairman Mao’s Continuing Revolutionary Thought—to only be able to openly commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution by coming from the mainland to Hong Kong. There are even several comrades from the mainland who originally wanted to participate in this activity but received all sorts of pressure and restrictions and thus were unable to make the trip.”*

Chen also noted that on the mainland the study group would not be able to hold open demonstrations or even operate legally. This is only possible in Hong Kong. **He noted that even an attempt by the masses to organize a**



*A Maoist rally against the Chinese government and its capitalist practices. This rally took place in Hong Kong in 2018 and was organized by the Mao Zedong Thought Study Group.*

**commemoration of Mao’s 124th birthday was stopped by the police on the grounds that the demonstration would “seriously disturb the social order.”** Chen went on to explain that this is because the CCP wants to turn Mao into a religious icon in order to erase his legacy as a revolutionary:

*“Today’s China already has truly completed capitalist restoration, but this restoration was carried out by capitalist roaders within the party who stole the people’s power. What they stole was the revolutionary legacy left behind by Chairman Mao. Therefore to justify the legitimacy of their own rule, they hung up a portrait of Chairman Mao in Tiananmen Square. But we are very clear, they are only trying to turn Chairman Mao into a harmless religious icon to make offerings to, in order to fool the people, and to extend the life of their rule. They fear the people will wake up, they fear that revolutionary theory, when mastered by the masses, will become a material force that will smash them. Therefore, they are not willing to see the people commemorating Chairman Mao, they are not willing to see the people on their own studying and publicizing Mao Zedong Thought, and they want to monopolize the right to interpret Mao Zedong Thought, to pump away Mao Zedong’s “it’s right to rebel” spirit in order to decorate the facade.”*

All of this helps to clarify the stakes of the struggle in Hong Kong. For many revolutionaries in China, Hong Kong is the last refuge where they can flee if facing persecution by the state. Likewise, it is the only place where they can conduct open and above-ground mass work. The capitalist class who now run the CCP have decided to ban and suppress all forms of open political organizing. **This repression is so severe that even mass demonstrations celebrating Mao's birthday are prohibited.** The Chinese media has attempted to portray the demonstrators in Hong Kong as simply reckless rioters, pro-U.S. elements, or anti-mainland snobs. Similarly, the U.S. and allies' media outlets have, for different reasons, focused on the pro-U.S. and pro-British protesters who, in reality, represent a small minority of the millions of people who have taken to the streets.

Contemporary China is internally a fascist country. **All protests are banned, the people do not have the political right to criticize the government, people now can even be prosecuted for being in chat groups where someone criticizes the government, and activists are routinely arrested, tortured, and disappeared.** The CCP has detained over a million Muslim Uighurs (an ethnic minority in the Northwest of the country) for their religion and placed observers in many people's houses to monitor their every activity. They have also rolled out a fascist "social



*Uighurs in a Chinese "re-education" camp in the northwest province of Xinjiang. The Chinese government has detained at least one million Uighurs in these camps.*

credit system" that allows the government to track every move every citizen makes and ranks their actions accordingly. This system is paired with a state-of-the-art surveillance system that uses facial recognition to track people's daily movements throughout the country.

*The CCP has detained over a million Muslim Uighurs [...] for their religion and placed observers in many people's houses to monitor their every activity.*

While there are many issues in Hong Kong—including widespread poverty, neoliberal policies, and police brutality—the people there enjoy far greater democratic freedom than people in mainland China. **In this sense, the struggle in Hong Kong should be understood as a class struggle to prevent the Chinese ruling class from being able to carry out an outright and open terroristic dictatorship of capital which prohibits even basic forms of dissent.** While there are a good number of revolutionaries in the protest movement in Hong Kong, there is also a broad section of the masses of people who have primarily joined the movement because they do not want to lose the basic democratic freedoms that they currently have. This is not the first time the masses of people in Hong Kong have fought against an imposition of the fascist laws that exist in mainland China.



*A poster mocking Deng Xiaoping at the Mao Zedong Thought Study Group's rally.*

## Recent Protests in Hong Kong and Their Relation to the Class Struggle on the Mainland

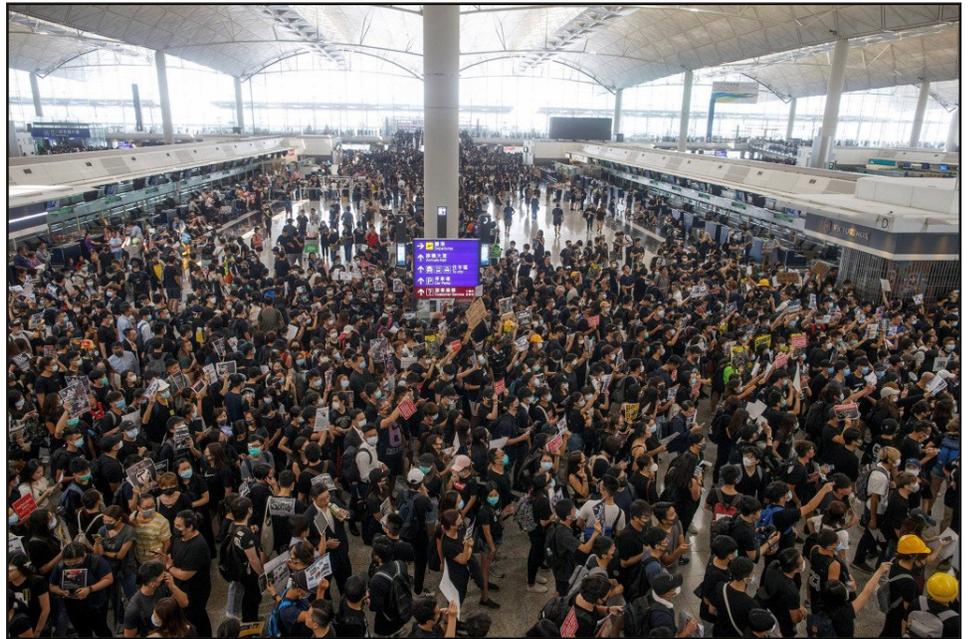
After the British left, the CCP began efforts to impose their laws and repressive measures in Hong Kong. While they had officially agreed to wait until 2047 to do this, the capitalists like Deng Xiaoping were unsurprisingly not true to their word. In 2017, a spokesman for the CCP's foreign ministry openly acknowledged that they considered the Sino-British Joint Declaration "a historical document, [that] no longer has any practical significance."<sup>3</sup>

Since the coup in 1976, the Chinese ruling class have been trying to bring Hong Kong back under the thumb of the mainland. They were particularly concerned that some revolutionaries had escaped from arrest and execution in the 1976 counter-revolution.

In his 2018 talk in Hong Kong, Chen Hongtao explained how revolutionaries were treated during the counter-revolution:

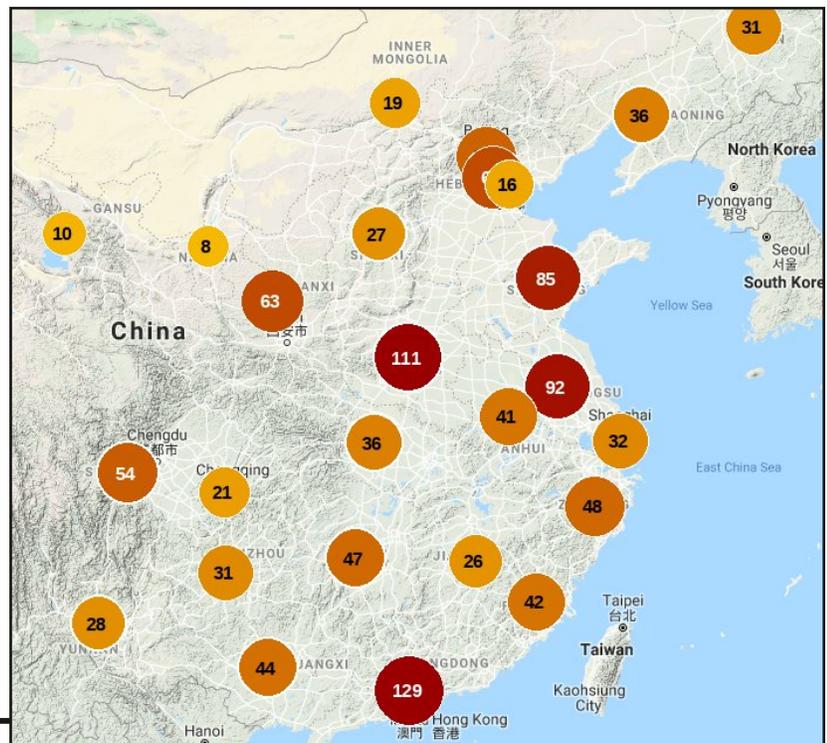
*"It was in the midst of that cruel class vengeance, that Zhu Zancheng, the commune's party committee secretary and director of the revolutionary committee was falsely charged as the lead criminal in the "East City's Counter Revolutionary Hit, Smash and Plunder Case" and was sentenced to death and executed on the spot. Executed at same time were Cai Shuangzi, the secretary of the commune's Communist Youth League, and Wang Dezhu, branch secretary of one of the commune's brigades."*

The CCP have stepped up their efforts to impose their control in Hong Kong over the last decade. Since the financial crisis in 2008, the working-class strike movement has grown throughout China.<sup>4</sup> Faced with a high level of mass



*In August, 2019 thousands of protesters in Hong Kong shut down the airport for several days. Protests like this show the degree of organization and coordination in the movement.*

rebellion, the CCP has cracked down on a huge scale. Students have been arrested just for holding Marxist study groups. The Chinese capitalist class sees these as dangerous because students who learn about Marxism quickly realize that China is not in fact a socialist country, and because of this many go on to organize for revolution in China.





*Over 50 students from prestigious Chinese universities went to Shenzhen to support the workers' struggle to form an independent union at the Jasic Technologies factory. Workers and students faced police raids, arrests, and forced "disappearances" by the capitalist Chinese state.*

Recently a number of college graduates forsook well-paid jobs in business or the CCP and instead got working-class jobs in Shenzhen (which is in mainland China) at a large factory run by Jasic Technology Company. **They supported the workers struggle to form a union which was met with vicious state-sponsored attacks.** First workers and union organizers were repeatedly physically attacked by goons sent by the company and the CCP. After the government denied them the right to form a union, the workers went ahead with the effort anyway. The workers and a number of the former students were arrested and tortured. **After months of torture some students eventually recanted their support for the workers, but other students who refused to recant have been disappeared and are either still being tortured or have been killed.**

These stories have spread throughout the country and garnered international attention, and similar incidents in China have occurred time and time again. The people in Hong Kong have closely watched these incidents. **For**

**example, after the Jasic Incident, there were a series of protests in solidarity with the Jasic Workers in Hong Kong that included trade unionists, middle class activists, and revolutionaries.** As a result of this level of solidarity and political consciousness the CCP's efforts to accelerate the incorporation of Hong Kong have been met with great resistance.

The current protest movement in Hong Kong was preceded by 2014 Umbrella Movement, which was named after the umbrellas that protesters used to deflect tear gas canisters and water cannons used by the police. **This movement began when on August 31st, 2014 the Chinese government announced a continuation and expansion of various controls over elections in Hong Kong.** While people had been promised universal suffrage to elect the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, the Chinese central government announced that it would pre-screen candidates before the elections and retained the power to approve or reject candidates after they were

elected. **The people saw this for what it was, democracy in name, but autocracy in practice. Their anger and frustration exploded into a massive protest movement.**

By late September, the protesters were occupying major city centers and roads. **Despite police backlash, the protests persisted for 79 days, actively fighting against the suppression.** Towards the end of the movement, hundreds were arrested towards, and some of the leaders and activists received jail sentences ranging from six months to a year.

Although the protests did not get the universal suffrage that they were asking for, the Umbrella Movement played a crucial role in the people of Hong Kong's fight against the Chinese state's efforts to incorporate them into the mainland. The Umbrella Movement itself was, in some senses, a continuation of previous mass protests, such as the 2012 anti-national education movement. **Given this legacy, the people were clear that one victory or defeat did not mean an end to their struggle.**



They understood that these movements are part of a long-term struggle to prevent the overturning of their democratic rights and freedoms. What's more, the most advanced and revolutionary forces in the Umbrella Movement and the current protests in Hong Kong are clear about the link between the struggles on mainland China and those in Hong Kong.

### The Current Protest Movement in Hong Kong

The current protest movement in Hong Kong is a continuation of prior struggles against the imposition of mainland

rule. **This particular protest movement was sparked by the Hong Kong government's efforts to pass an extradition bill which would have allowed the Chinese government to have those accused of crimes in China be extradited to the mainland from Hong Kong.** This bill was supported by Hong Kong politicians closely aligned with the Chinese government, and many people were worried that it would effectively end Hong Kong's autonomous status and the "One Country, Two Systems" policy. These concerns had mounted over the years as a number of Hong Kong citizens have been kidnapped and brought to the mainland by the mainland police.

*The current protest movement in Hong Kong is a continuation of prior struggles against the imposition of mainland rule.*

So when the extradition bill was introduced it set off a series of protests and resistance. The initial waves of protests began in March and April. In the biggest of these protests, over 100,000 people came out in opposition to the bill. These initial protests were principally organized by the Civil Human Rights Front, an alliance of 50 pro-democracy groups in Hong



*Protesters use laser pointers to disrupt the police and facial recognition technology. Given the development of surveillance in China and around the world, it is important to learn from these tactics.*

Kong. Some of these groups are closely aligned with the U.S. state, but most are liberal reformist groups who have illusions about capitalist democracy and the United Nations. **While they took the lead in organizing these protests, many others from across the society, including Maoists and revolutionaries, also participated.**

It's also important to see that the overall struggle against the extradition bill and the erasure of democratic rights is in the interests of the people. **While the people are not ultimately free under capitalist democracy—which imposes the chains of wage slavery and poverty on the masses—it is right to rebel against reactionaries and their attempts to impose fascist laws that outlaw above-ground organizing and protests.**

After the initial wave of protests, a number of legislators launched a filibuster campaign against the bill, but the government of Hong Kong made a series of underhanded maneuvers to circumvent this filibuster and ram the bill through.

**This further outraged the masses of people and shattered the illusions of many who believed that the legislators would prevent the bill from passing.** A series of protests followed which aimed to stop the Legislative Council from passing the extradition bill. On June 9th, over a million people protested, and on June 12th around 2,000,000 people participated in a general strike across the



*The police in Hong Kong have deployed unprecedented force against protesters. This has included tear gas, rubber bullets, and even live ammunition.*

city. These are staggering numbers considering that the population of the city is around 7,500,000. **The police responded to these protests with extreme force, and did not wear identifying numbers on their uniforms so they could not be held accountable for their brutality.**

Despite the police repression, these protests forced Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, to suspend the bill on June 15th in an attempt to placate the movement. **However, this plan backfired and on June 16th around 2,000,000 people took to the streets again. Protests continued through the next week, and people besieged the police headquarters—in protest of their brutality—as well as the series of government buildings.** The refusal by Lam to withdraw the bill marked a turning point in the movement, and the people began to protest in larger numbers against a whole series of other issues in Hong Kong, above and beyond the extradition bill.

This is important because the issues in Hong Kong are not limited to the threat of being ruled by the mainland. What's more, if Hong Kong broke away from China, and became a financial city-state like Singapore, this would not ultimately be in the people's interests. **Therefore it's important that the movement take stock of the many social issues that the people of Hong Kong face, and also that they work to link their struggle to the class struggles in the**

**mainland.**

On July 1st, a series of protesters stormed the Legislative Council Complex—roughly equivalent to Capitol Hill in the U.S.—and occupied the building. They smashed through the front doors with improvised battering rams and flooded into the building. Once inside, they spray-painted slogans such as **“It was you who taught me peaceful marches did not work,”** (是你教我和平遊行是没用) as well as other political messages. After a few hours they were forced out by the police.

**This protest and storming of the Legislative Council Complex represented a shift in the**

**movement, after which an increasingly large number of the masses realized that peaceful protests alone are not capable of defeating the oppressors.** Since this point, protests have expanded in scope and spread throughout the entirety of Hong Kong, especially to the working class neighborhoods.

**This shift in strategy is significant because it indicates that the movement has taken stock of the failures of the Umbrella Movement, which was defeated in large part because the protesters tried to occupy three major locations in the city.** This led to them being inflexible in their tactics. They were unable to meet head-on assaults by the police and eventually folded under the repression. In contrast the present movement has adopted a series of tactics summed up and popularized in slogans like **“gather like dew”** when coordinating an action and **“scatter like mist”** to avoid police repression. These slogans help to clarify the tactics of the movement to the people on a mass level.

The protests have been met with an ever increasingly level of police brutality, arrests, repression, and even killings, so adopting these tactics has been essential for the survival of the movement. Some may believe that it is impossible for the people to confront a powerful, well armed police force and the related surveillance state. However, the movement in Hong Kong has shown that this is not true.





*Protesters confront police in riot gear in Hong Kong. The protesters wear masks and use umbrellas to deflect tear gas canisters launched by the police.*

Protesters wear masks to protect their identities, they collectively work to spray paint over security cameras and destroy the surveillance stations the police install throughout the city. **When they do confront the police head on the protesters form into a compact block, use laser pointers to disrupt and distract the cops and their cameras, they have umbrellas to repel the tear gas canisters, they set up barricades, and even use firebombs and bricks to repel the police attacks.** The police have blinded protesters with “non-lethal” weapons, used tear gas indoors and in subway stations, arrested hundreds, and even killed some protesters. However, despite this, the movement has largely succeeded in overwhelming the police time and time again.

*The state-run Xinhua news agency even publicly stated that any form of secessionism in Hong Kong “will be crushed.”*

In response to these protests the CCP has coordinated with local thugs in Hong Kong and encouraged them to attack protesters. They have also published a series of videos of the People’s Liberation Army garrison in Hong Kong conducting training drills to

counter protests with machine guns and tanks. Videos of thousands of PLA troops training on the border with Hong Kong were also publicized. The state-run Xinhua news agency even publicly stated that any form of secessionism in Hong Kong “will be crushed.” Similar threats have been repeatedly issued by the CCP and their media other outlets.

In part because these threats have not yet placated protesters, Carrie Lam formally withdrew the extradition bill on September 4th, but protesters were quick

to criticize this as “too little, too late.” Even after this maneuver by Lam, the protest movement has continued, and they have intensified their efforts to spread the movement in a series of different ways, including through boycotting pro-mainland businesses. When Lam tried once again to placate the people by holding a “public dialogue” only 100 members of the public showed up to the event, but thousands gathered outside to protest her, trapping her inside the venue for hours.

Recently, students have taken control of several universities, and barricaded the schools to keep the police out. **These actions came shortly after police gunned down a protester in cold-blood and then pinned him to the ground to handcuff him as he was bleeding out all over the street.** Students have seized the bows and arrows from the schools as well as other athletic gear that can be used to fight back against the police. They have also set up makeshift catapults that can fire petrol bombs over 500 feet. These and other implements have been used to fend off police attacks. All of this shows the city is on the verge of an open insurrection.

Given that efforts to placate and buy off the protesters have not been successful, and given that the police have not been able to repress the movement, Carrie Lam and the legislature passed an anti-mask law and a declaration of emergency. These emergency

powers were used on numerous occasions by the British during their colonial rule of Hong Kong, but had not been invoked post-1997, until now. **They give the police sweeping powers to stop and frisk anyone, at any time, for any reason.** This has turned Hong Kong into an effective police state, and yet despite this the protests continue on a large scale, all across the city. This is likely the last form of escalation the city can carry out, short of calling in the PLA and other mainland forces.

## Contradictions in the Movement and the Way Forward

Like any mass movement involving millions of people, the struggles in Hong Kong are very complex and the protest movement involves a bunch of different political forces with different goals, ideas and strategies. The initial wave of protests was largely planned and coordinated by liberal reformist groups, including some pro-U.S. groups with links to the CIA. And at one point a small group of protesters even held a demonstration outside the U.S. consulate in Hong Kong while holding American flags and signs that called for Donald Trump to “liberate Hong Kong.”

While the U.S. and Chinese media focused on this demonstration to bolster their own differing narratives about the protests, the movement is not reducible to these forces, and they represent a small minority. **The movement as a whole also includes Maoists, anarchists, trade unionists, students, and others.** As the demonstrations have grown more militant and taken on direct confrontation with the police, many of the more liberal groups have distanced themselves from these demonstrations, but often have stopped short of outright condemning such methods. This has actually been one of the strengths of the movement so far. Despite a wider range of political differences, groups have been able to unite around shared opposition to the imposition of dictatorial laws and policies.

**Despite this success in preventing splits and a fracturing of the movement, the different political ideas within the movement should not be written off as unimportant or irrelevant.** A relatively small number of protesters—who receive a disproportionately large amount of media attention—are very pro-U.S. and funded by the CIA. This is a real contradiction that the movement needs to address. These people are not ultimately for the people, but merely opportunists who hope to use

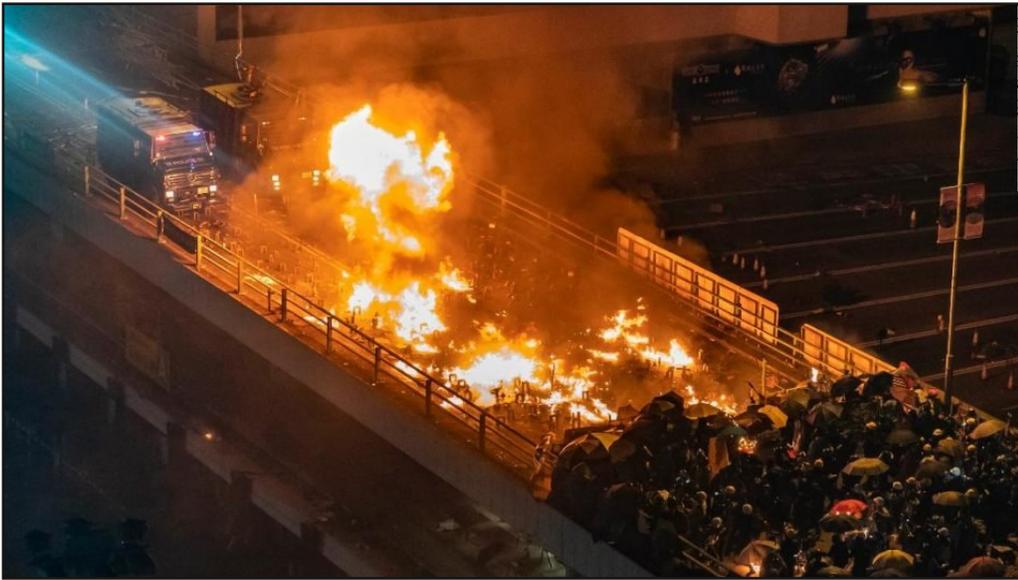


*Given the PLA presence in Hong Kong and on the border, many are worried about a direct military intervention.*

the ongoing political movement to break Hong Kong from China and turn it into a U.S. neocolony and financial hub.

Other contradictions exist in the movement. For example, many of the wealthy elite in Hong Kong have offered some degree of support for the movement, because they do not want to lose their money and power to the mainland billionaires who run the CCP. These people are opposed to losing their power, but not opposed to oppression and exploitation. **As the protest movement has grown and larger issues like working conditions, poverty, and living conditions have become focuses of the movement, these members of the Hong Kong elite have grown wary.** They do not want to lose their power to rival billionaires in the mainland, but even more than that they fear the wrath and power of the working masses of people. In the end these people may very well compromise with the CCP to prevent themselves from being expropriated and driven from power.

There are also those in the movement who have many illusions about capitalist democracy. These are generally well-intentioned middle-class reformers and students. They correctly see the fascist nature of the class rule in China—which prohibits all dissent and protests—and want to avoid this sort of rule spreading to Hong Kong.



*Students at Hong Kong University hold off a police assault after they barricaded the university and made improvised weapons from track and field equipment. These tactics mark the beginning of a near-insurrectionary situation.*

However, these people generally are blind to the horrors of capitalist democracy and how it binds the vast majority in the chains of wage slavery, shackles them in poverty, and condemns them to an early grave from stress and overwork. It is possible and even necessary to work with middle-class reformers in a big mass movement. However, it is also important to engage in a ideological struggle against the reformist ideas these people promote. This doesn't have to be a polemical struggle that leads to a split, but it's important to not let reformists deceive the masses of people into believing that a "liberal democracy" will solve all the problems they face.

*Hanging above the movement like the Sword of Damocles is the threat of military intervention from the mainland.*

Hanging above the movement like the Sword of Damocles is the threat of military intervention from the mainland. There is a PLA garrison in Hong Kong, and a number of troops have been mobilized along the border. As the movement persists and continues to grow, there is a real possibility that China will use military force to crush the protests. **At present, it is not possible for the protesters to go toe-to-toe**

with the Chinese military if they send in tanks and soldiers armed with machine guns and high-powered rifles. Therefore, the movement must develop a strategy for how to deal with this threat.

Already the movement in Hong Kong has polarized China as a country. The CCP has claimed that the protest movement is the result of interference by the U.S. and Britain. Likewise, state-run media outlets have worked hard to depict the protesters as "anti-Chinese" and pro-America. While some

have been taken in by these lies and distortions, many within China—especially those in the revolutionary movement—see through this nonsense. **Some have already been working to link up the struggles in Hong Kong to those in the mainland, as the above remarks by Chen Hongtao show.**

The protest movement has already succeeded in forcing the CCP and the Hong Kong government to scrap the extradition bill. This and other significant reforms can be won by the present movement. **However, in order to overthrow the oppressors and establish a pro-people society, it will be necessary for the movement in Hong Kong to become part of a larger revolutionary movement to topple the CCP, expropriate the wealth of the billionaires, and reestablish socialism in China.** Without such a revolutionary overthrow, the CCP will certainly intervene military to annex Hong Kong and impose a brutal military rule on the people.

**Despite the difficult road ahead, the movement in Hong Kong has already accomplished a lot.** They have not only defeated the extradition bill, but also mobilized millions to fight for real change. The movement in Hong Kong has also inspired many people around the world, and the protesters ability to thwart the police and their surveillance systems provide valuable lessons for revolutionaries and political movements everywhere. ★

# The Deadlock in Israeli Elections

by Khalil & Joe



*Benny Gantz (left) and Benjamin Netanyahu (right) share a moment. Long-time partners in crime, they are now competing against each other in the Israeli elections.*

*The Israeli political system is at an impasse, with the leading politicians, Benny Gantz and Benjamin Netanyahu, both unable to form a government. As the country heads towards a third election in less than a year, the deadlock exposes the reactionary nature of the Israeli state and the need for Palestinian liberation.*

Recently, the Zionist state of Israel has been mired in political crisis. **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not only facing numerous charges of corruption, but has been unable to rally his base to win the elections in the past year.** After a decade of ruling as Prime Minister, his political career is now balanced on a knife's edge. Israel has a parliamentary political system in which a coalition government between several political parties must be formed by a party leader nominated by the President (usually the leader of the party that won the most seats). If that coalition passes a vote in the Knesset (the name for Israel's parliament) then that party leader becomes the Prime Minister.

The elections this past spring resulted in a deadlock between Netanyahu's incumbent Likud Party and Benny Gantz's Blue and White coalition and when no government could be formed. As a result, new elections were called for September which have only resulted in another deadlock. Now, for a second time this year, both Netanyahu and Gantz have failed to form a government. The probability of a third election in Israel is extremely high. By the time these elections are

conducted, this whole process will have gone on for almost an entire year. **In this political circus, it is important we see that the elections in Israel are not a way forward for the people of Palestine.** In fact, this sort of political deadlock among the reactionaries is a good thing for the people—the more the enemy fights among themselves, the easier it is to organize for liberation.

In order to win reelection Netanyahu has advocated increasingly fascist and imperialist policies in his efforts to win support especially among the religious right. **These efforts include allying with the extremist Jewish Power Party, calling for war with Iran, and calling for the annexation of the West Bank, which would not only be a violation of international law, but would signal a rapid acceleration of the settler-colonial project and genocide of the Palestinian people.** Netanyahu has a long record of extreme aggression towards Palestinians. In 2014, he oversaw the brutal war against Gaza which left thousands of people, mostly civilians, dead. He promoted and justified the expansion of settlements and settler violence against Palestinians throughout his tenure.

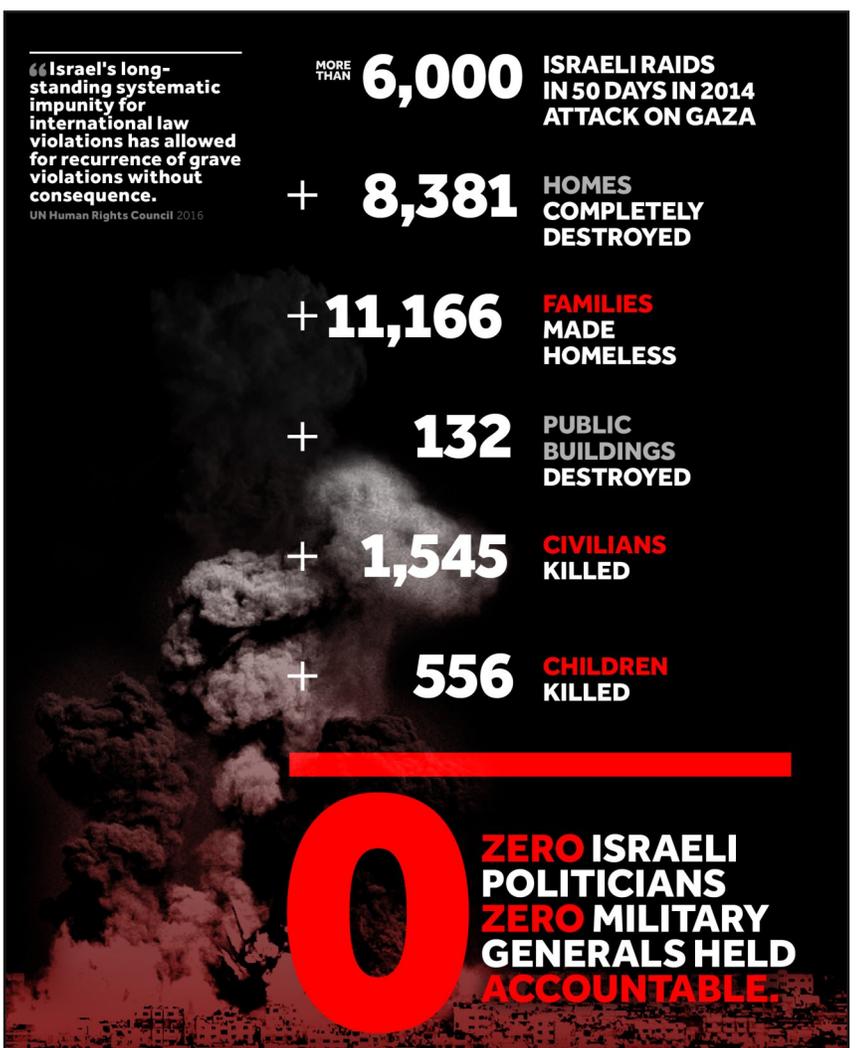


In much of the U.S. media, Gantz has been portrayed as a more “liberal” choice in these elections. He regularly lambasts Netanyahu for his collection of corruption charges, for which the latter has been under investigation for since 2016. Gantz supports secularizing some aspects of Israeli society, which is extremely religious.

For example, public transportation in many Israeli cities is closed on the Sabbath (Saturday). Gantz would end this, and allow for public transit to operate on the Sabbath. **However, these milquetoast reforms are not meant to serve the people, nor do they put Gantz on the “left.” What these reforms would do is to make Israel a more secular fascist colonial state, instead of a religious fascist colonial state.** More than that, promotion of these reforms is a smokescreen to the real reactionary nature of the Israeli political system and society.

This becomes abundantly clear when one digs beneath the surface. For example, Gantz claims to be more “open to dialogue” with the Palestinian Authority and the Joint List (the Arab Parties in Israel), but this does not mean he is a “pro-Palestine” or “peace” candidate. In fact he is rabidly anti-Palestinian himself. Netanyahu and Gantz have called for much of the same policies and share the same vision of a “strong” apartheid state. **Gantz even said that he was glad that Netanyahu “came around” on the idea of annexing the West Bank, thus implying Gantz was the one who first came up with the plan.**

In some areas Gantz appears to be even more militaristic and oppressive than Netanyahu. For example he advocates for increased military operations against Palestinians in Gaza. **In fact, a major part of his campaign has been to claim that Netanyahu is not “tough enough” on the Palestinians and neighboring Arab countries.** Other rivals of Netanyahu have made this claim a major point in the elections, such as former Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who resigned in 2018 after Netanyahu agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza. Lieberman said that this ceasefire amounted to “surrendering to terror.” Knowing that Netanyahu has carried out



genocidal wars against Palestine, this raises big fears about what his rivals would do to be “tougher.”

Genocide is a possibility, not a far fetched reality. Gantz was a high-up general of the IDF during the 2014 war on Gaza, and played a huge role in orchestrating, green-lighting, and planning the slaughter of Palestinians during this war. **In fact, on election day, preliminary arguments were being made against Gantz at the Hague in the Netherlands for war crimes that he committed in Gaza in 2014.** At least 2,251 people were killed in this war according to the UN, and two-thirds of those killed were civilians. The war was characterized by IDF targeting of civilians, mosques, schools, hospitals, and more. During the campaign Gantz even bragged about these war crimes, boasting about sending Gaza “back to the Stone Age.”

Even though the Joint List views any change in political leadership as a positive for Palestine, the reality is that they are a political pawn and are consistently denied any sort of real power within the Knesset. The recent Israeli

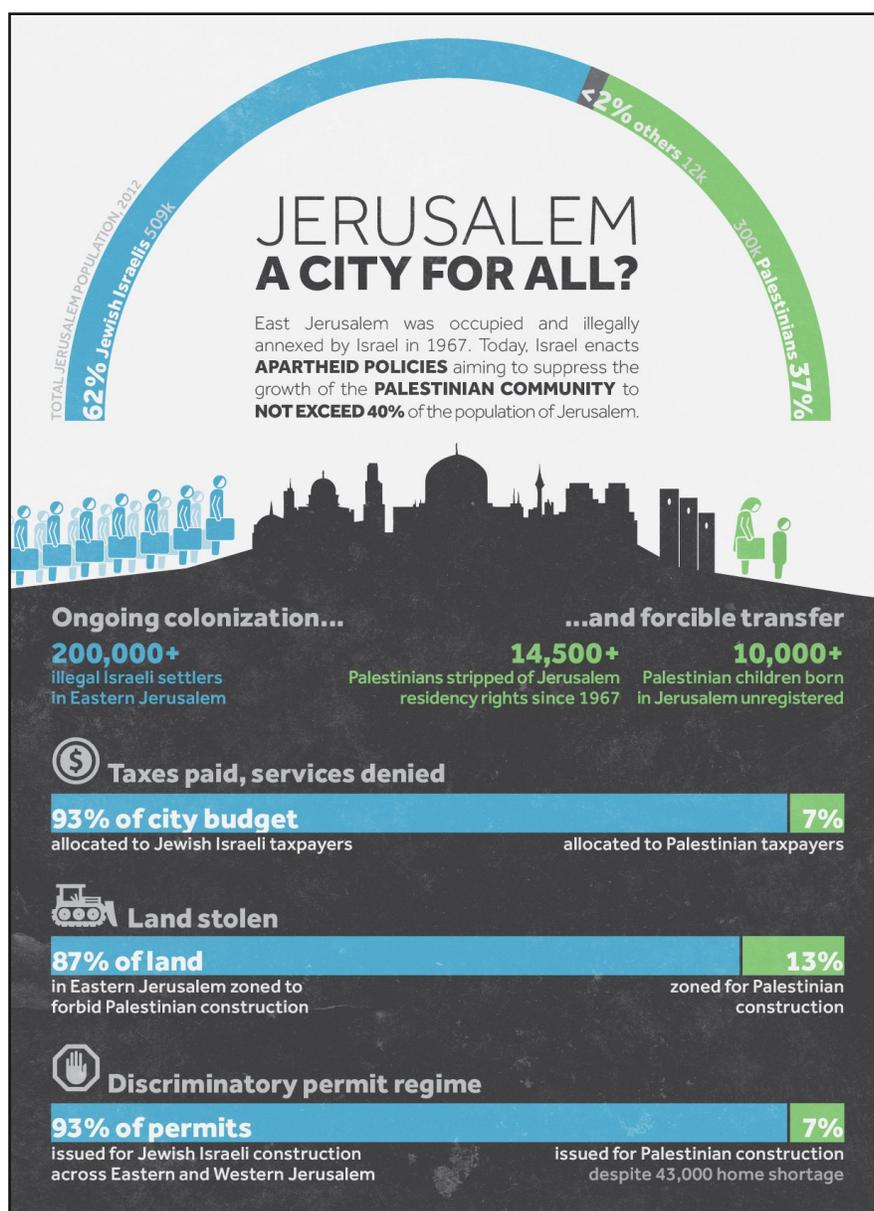
elections, like all the previous ones, are competitions between different sections of racist Zionists, with the majority of people denied any real power.

Palestinians make up 21% of the Israeli population and around 42% of the population of Israel and the Palestinian Territories combined. **This does not include the over 6 million Palestinian refugees denied the right to return to their homeland.** While Palestinian citizens of Israel (aka Israeli-Arabs) are granted the right to vote, those in the West Bank and Gaza are denied any say whatsoever in the Israeli political system (despite the fact that their lives are largely under the colonial control of Israel). Many Palestinians felt the outcome of the recent elections would be the same regardless of the results, that Netanyahu and Gantz are two sides of the same racist coin.

In the last election, the Joint List ended up being the third largest group in the Knesset, in spite of real anger and mistrust of the Israeli government by Israeli-Arabs. This contradiction is apparent in the fact that the April elections saw an Israeli-Arab voter turnout of 49%, the lowest in Israeli history. In the September elections this rebounded to 60%, but was still well below the 2015 voter turnout of 64%.

However, the Joint List are not viewed as legitimate parties by Netanyahu and Gantz. The Joint List will not be invited to join a coalition government, despite the fact that they threw their support behind Gantz in an effort to dethrone Netanyahu. **The Zionist movement constantly strives to paint Arabs as internal enemies, or even—in the words of Lieberman—a “fifth column” (in reference to the underground Nazi organizations in Poland and other countries that facilitated the German invasions during World War II).**

This racist fearmongering is part of a larger project to impose fascist restrictions on the Arab Palestinian population. For example, in the recent elections, the Likud Party set up cameras in the voting stations in order to monitor Arab voters, an



open attempt at intimidation. In the desperation of the different Palestinian parties to support anyone but Netanyahu, they seem to have forgotten that the Israeli ruling class views the existence of Palestine and its people as antithetical to Israel.

It's important to mention that Israeli-Arabs are still denied equal rights in Israel even though they are allowed the right to vote. For example, it is illegal in Israel for people of different religions to marry. **In addition, the Jewish National Fund (which controls all of Israel's land) prohibits Israeli land from being transferred to or purchased by non-Jews.** There are a whole series of other laws which serve to discriminate against Israeli-Arabs, and often separate legal codes are applied to Jews and non-Jews. This apartheid system shows that the claim of Israel being a “democracy” is little more than a twisted lie meant to justify the oppression of Palestinians.



**Israeli Prime Minister  
Benjamin Netanyahu's  
approach to Palestinians:**

**“beat them up, not once  
but repeatedly, beat them up so  
it hurts so badly, until it's  
unbearable.”**

Israel has increasingly worked to disenfranchise and isolate the non-Jewish population. **In 2018 for example, Israel passed the Jewish Nation State Law, which made Hebrew the sole official language (where previously both Hebrew and Arabic were official) and stated that self-determination was a right reserved only for the Jewish population of Israel.** The law effectively consolidated what had already been true for decades—that the Israeli state relies on a form of Jewish supremacy which has relegated non-Jews to second-class citizen status.

This is underlined by the fact that the night of the September election, Netanyahu stated that “There can't be a government that relies on the Arab parties. Parties that negate the very existence of the state of Israel”. Netanyahu has made even more inflammatory and racist statements, such as before the September election when he claimed that “Arabs want to annihilate us all.” **But these racist remarks do not just**

**come from Netanyahu and his Likud Party.** Many other leaders, either conveniently forget the existence of Palestinians, or openly state support for an apartheid ethno-state, such as the statement of Moshe Ya'alon (former Chief of Staff of the IDF and member of Gantz's Blue and White Party) that “We claim that Israel should have been Jewish and democratic”.

**Israel is often called the “only democracy in the Middle East” by the capitalist media, but in reality, it is an apartheid state built on the colonialist and racist ideology of Zionism.** “Democracy” only exists for the ruling class in Israel, not for the Palestinians and not even for the majority of poor and working-class Israelis. It is a capitalist democracy for the Jewish Israeli population, but acts in a brutally fascist manner towards Palestinians. The Israeli government has never and will never stand for the rights and the well-being of the people of Palestine and will continue to use them as pawns as the Israeli state continues the genocide of the Palestinian people.

**Many Palestinians have long been aware of the fact that the outcomes of the Israeli elections have little bearing on their daily situation: all Israeli governments have pursued war, imprisonment, abuse, murder, rape, and economic strangulation towards them.** This is a result of the genocidal and racist logic inherent in Zionism itself. From the start, the project of Zionism was one of dispossessing a people of their land, a colonial theft that had to be justified by labeling the victims as lesser—less civilized, less intelligent, etc. **Zionism, being an ideology of colonialism, relies on racism to divide the people and justify the exploitation and ethnic cleansing of minority populations and Palestinians.**

The apartheid system and promotion of Zionism by the Israeli state has also served to convince even poor and working-class Israelis that their enemies are the Palestinians and not the fascist

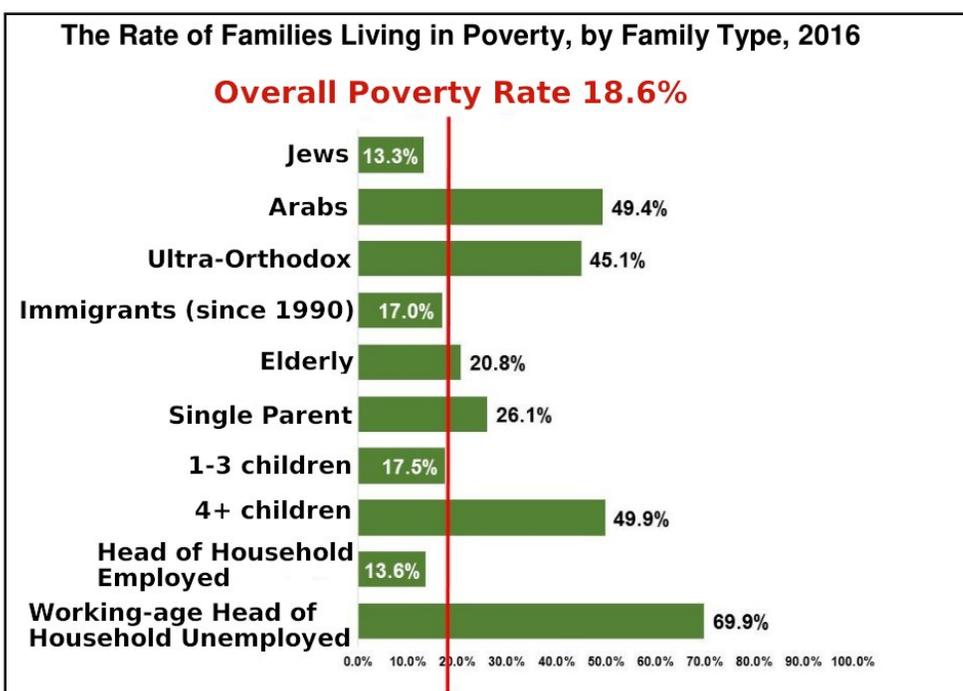
ruling elite in Israel. A 2018 report by the National Insurance Institute in Israel reported that over 21% of Israelis live below the poverty line, and the rate is more than twice as high among Israeli-Arab (Palestinian citizens of Israel) and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities.

It's important to emphasize that the Zionist ruling class is not just racist against Palestinians and Arabs, but also against African migrants and even other Jews, especially those from Ethiopia, Morocco, or Algeria who make up 15% of the Israeli population. These groups of people are often forced into some of the lowest-paying and dangerous jobs and they live poorest communities. They are exploited and oppressed by both the Israeli state and capitalist system, as well as the racist ideology of Zionism.

***Netanyahu, Gantz, and others are united in supporting apartheid and the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people.***

As it stands, there is a basis for poor and oppressed Israelis to join with Palestinians in the fight against Zionism and for the creation of a democratic, secular, and even socialist future in Palestine. **However, the ideological chains of Zionism remain strong within Israel, and the stratified nature of the apartheid society convinces many—even Palestinian citizens of Israel—that they have nothing to complain about since they are better off than the people below them.**

All of this does not mean the differences between the politicians in Israel are unimportant. In fact, they are quite important in order to understand the deep contradictions that exist in Israeli society. However, in understanding their differences it is important to see that Netanyahu, Gantz, and others are united in supporting



*The Israeli state not only oppresses Palestinians, but also has many Jews living in extreme poverty.*

apartheid and the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people. While the ruling class is united on these questions, and expanding Israeli influence in the region, the divisions in the Israeli political system have nevertheless created serious problems for the ability of the state to pursue these goals.

**In this context, there is a possibility for people's movements in both Palestine and Israel to grow and challenge the oppressive policies of the state of Israel towards both the Palestinian people and oppressed groups in Israeli society.** The Palestinian liberation movement—long disorganized and misled by opportunist forces like Hamas and Fatah—could see a major revitalization and make great advances. The threat of annexing West Bank territories could also lead to a big resurgence in organized anti-colonial and anti-Zionist struggles. This in turn can serve as the basis for a popular challenge towards Zionism within Israel itself.

However, there are also many difficulties facing the people which hinder the development of this possibility, not the least of which is the lack of a principled, pro-people, and revolutionary force in either Israel or Palestine. It is important to remember that these divisions and difficulties did not emerge out of nowhere. Much like the divisions internal to the ruling class, they have a history of development, have been influenced and changed by people's movements, and thus can be changed in the future.

After the initial dispossession and ethnic cleansing of Palestinian people in 1948 (the Nakba, or “catastrophe” in Arabic), hundreds of thousands of refugees entered the West Bank and Gaza, then under the control of Jordan and Egypt, respectively. **They were barred from returning to their homes by Israel and those who remained were systematically deprived of their rights.** After the 1967 war, these territories and other parts of Palestine were put under the control of Israel, and the Palestinian population was subjected to a brutal military occupation that continues to this day.

The armed resistance led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which aimed to free all of Palestine, including the lands stolen in 1948, grew to be a serious threat to Israel after the occupation began. While they posed a threat to Israel for a while, and inspired Palestinian people, the PLO was not ultimately successful. The PLO began to lose strength after the Black September massacre in 1970, and due to an inability to handle internal issues and differences (in addition to brutal repression and military attacks) gradually lost touch with the daily struggle of the people. By the 1980s, they began to negotiate with Israel to end the liberation struggle.

After the First Intifada—a mass uprising in 1987 that erupted without the leadership of the PLO—**Israel became increasingly concerned about the possibility of revolution in the Palestinian territories, and worked to carve up the West Bank to maintain the occupation and eventually complete the ethnic cleansing of Palestine to create a single Jewish state.** In order to do so, Israel entered into negotiations with the leadership

of the PLO to turn it into a puppet government for Israel, the Palestinian Authority. These negotiations eventually resulted in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995.

With the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was carved into three “areas”—Area A controlled by the newly created Palestinian Authority (PA), Area B jointly controlled by the PA and Israel, and Area C controlled by Israel. This new division was widely publicized as a “step forward” in the creation of a Palestinian state, but in fact it was a huge step backwards. **It was the codification of an apartheid system that greatly restricted people’s rights.** Not only was Israel still directly in control of the majority of the territory in the West Bank (Area C accounts for about 61% of the land), but the Palestinian Authority and the ex-revolutionary parties like Fatah were turned into pawns of Israel—agents of Zionism with an Arab face.

The Palestinian Authority has since cooperated with Israel on many levels. Most notoriously, the PA collaborates and shares police intelligence with the IDF in order to track down, imprison, and even assassinate political activists in the West Bank. With the “official” Palestinian leadership coopted, the Israeli state has been more able to pursue the construction of Jewish-only settlements across in the West Bank.

These settlements not only expand Israel’s settler-colonial project but systematically restrict the Palestinian people’s ability to farm, access water, and even travel freely between Palestinian villages. Despite being illegal under international law, the number of settlements and the population in them have increased tremendously. The construction of settlements is part of the ongoing the theft of Palestinian land, and also leads to the construction of roads and highways “for settlers only” and new checkpoints and military personnel to police and oppress the Palestinians. All of this has been part of a concerted Israeli effort to chop up the Palestinian territories and disconnect them from each other. **The people are starved out, deprived of jobs and medical care, their homes destroyed, and many are even outright killed in this process of slow genocide and ethnic cleansing.**

Not only is Israel carrying out a slow genocide of



*African migrants in Israel protest racism, police brutality, and deportations. Many undocumented migrants and refugees come from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and other countries to find work in Israel, and are brutally oppressed and exploited there.*



*Israeli occupation forces systematically arrest, imprison, abuse, and torture Palestinian children.*

the Palestinian people, it is also looking to expand its territory and imperialist interests by means of regional wars. Israeli invaded Lebanon in 1982 and 2006, annexed the Golan Heights from Syria and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt in 1967 (although the latter was eventually returned), and has recently carried out a series of military actions in Syria.

Israel's imperialist interests are not just military and territorial, but economic and political. For example, in 2017 Netanyahu stated that the strengthening of ties between Israel and Africa—including allowing Israeli companies to buy and operate businesses in mining, agriculture, and energy on the continent—was a “priority” of Israeli foreign policy. **What's more, Israel has long played an important role in the world imperialist system as a developer and exporter of military technology and weaponry.** Repressive regimes around the world, from South Sudan to the Philippines and India are huge clients of the Israeli arms industry. By fostering economic, political, and military ties with regimes around the world, Israel is expanding its influence as an imperialist power.

Since the Oslo Accords, Israeli politics have become more openly right-wing and fascist. Their growth as an imperialist country and intensification of illegal settlements has fostered ideologies of fascism among the Israeli people and

strengthened militaristic tendencies of the Israeli state. And of course, this has resulted in a harsher reality for the people of Palestine. Due to a 12 year-long blockade and frequent aerial bombardments, the Gaza Strip has gone from a center of Palestinian life and culture to an open-air prison with conditions deemed “uninhabitable” by the United Nations. The settlements in the West Bank have massively increased in size and number. This has not only created daily difficulties for the Palestinian residents, but has also emboldened the IDF and right-wing Israeli settlers to attack and terrorize them.

So as the political turmoil and inability to form a government continues in Israel, revolutionaries around the world should seize on this opportunity to expose the true reactionary nature of Israel. The disagreements and debates between Zionists like Benjamin Netanyahu, Benny Gantz, Avigdor Lieberman, and others are not between “left” and “right” as commonly described. They are debates over how to best carry out a project of settler colonialism and genocide against the Palestinian people and make Israel a powerful imperialist country capable of exploiting oppressed nations and people all around the world. In order for real progress to be made in the liberation of Palestine and the creation of a single, secular, and democratic state, the ideology of Zionism must be seen for what it is—a racist, fascist, and settler-colonial ideology. ★



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