

SEIZE THE TIME

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A Short Primer on Dialectics

“Dialectics” is one of those terms that might seem like a buzz-word in the Marxist movement. Certainly, it is peppered throughout theoretical works, often with little explanation. Many of us are indeed guilty of using the term frivolously from time to time (myself certainly included). Yet we should absolutely *not* dismiss dialectics as merely a catch-word used to gain “Marxist-cred.” Dialectics, at least in its Marxist variant, can be an incredibly powerful tool in aiding our understanding of dynamic social forces, the tide of history, and ultimately what it will take to transcend capitalism once and for all.

Dialectics is a way of studying the phenomena of the world in a way that is quite a bit different than formal logic. Logic is undoubtedly very useful in many instances, but it has its limitations. Even the fundamental axioms of logic, which often seem intuitively obvious to western thinkers (e.g. $A = A$), only really hold when looking at the world at fixed moments in time. The empirical method, which predominates in most fields of science and is fundamentally founded in logic, involves taking measurements of real-world phenomena (necessarily captured at fixed moments in time) and attempts to form theories about how the world works from these empirical measurements. Undoubtedly, the empirical method is useful—we cannot be solipsistic and entirely denounce formal logic and empirical methods simply because they have limitations. But limitations they *do* have. When formal logic and empiricism attempt to make claims about how things change over time, especially in the complex worlds of history, social movements, and so on, things can get messy. The only tool available to the empirical method is essentially to take *a great many* fixed measurements and attempt to establish a trend. This is useful up to a point, but when dealing with fluid and complicated movements that are constantly in flux, empiricism necessarily requires that many assumptions be made for the sake of simplicity, and it is plainly impossible to capture *every* aspect of a phenomenon in this manner. The advantage of dialectics is that it looks at phenomena not at fixed moments in time, but in their totality. Dialectical thinking can allow one to consider extremely complex and nuanced social and historical movements, and ef-



fectively “reduce” them to instances of non-nuance in a way that is not arbitrary. Hopefully, what exactly is meant by this will make a great deal more sense later on.

The word “dialectics” comes from the Greek word *dialogo*, which essentially means to debate. In ancient Greece, dialectics was the method of uncovering the contradictions in the argument of one’s opponent, overcoming those contradictions, and thereby reaching truth. The German Idealist G. W. F. Hegel is usually credited as formulating the foundations of the more modern form of dialectics. Yet the Marxist variety, while incorporating the “rational kernel” of Hegel’s thought, is fundamentally different. For Hegel, dialectics was essentially a process of mental gesticulation, and his idealist philosophy held that mental processes (the Idea) created the world, and that external reality was merely a manifestation of the Idea. For Marxists, it is the opposite. Dialectics is a method that *describes* the external world. It is a materialist dialectics. We posit that the external world exists independent of us, and our thoughts reflect our perception of that external world. Thus, dialectics is a tool that we can use to understand material reality. What follows is a brief exposition on dialectics as it applies to Marxism.

Everything is interconnected

At the end of the day, the world is not a collection of happenings unrelated to one another. Everything is interwoven and interconnected. We cannot look at phenomena in isolation; we can only understand something if we understand its *relation* to other things.

A familiar example is the relationship between humans and their environment. Clearly, humans affect their environment. We cut down forests, dump greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, put noxious chemicals in our air and water, etc. Of course our effect on the environment need not be negative. At various moments, humans have developed mechanisms of attaining mastery over nature but in ways that are sustainable and not destructive. The point, though, is that human actions obviously have an impact on the natural world. However, this is not simply a one-way relationship; our environment also shapes human actions. Let’s take the example of forests. People affect the forest by logging. But let’s suppose a society logs to such an unsustainable degree that eventually, there are no more trees. This society would have to completely reorganize itself away from dependence upon lumber. In other words, it is clear that not only do

humans affect the environment by logging, but that the environment affects human society — the presence (or lack thereof) of natural resources plays a big role in determining societal structure and human actions.

Another example is pollution. The act of putting dangerous chemicals into the environment obviously affects the environment, but the changes in the environment pollution brings also come back and influence the way human society is structured. For instance, polluting the lakes and rivers can eventually pose a major problem for access to fresh water, which can cause drastic changes in how human society is organized. The point of all this is to note that humans and the environment are fundamentally interrelated. We cannot really understand the relationship between humans and the environment without understanding this interconnectedness. And this is a general principle applying to all things.

Contradictions exist in all things

Much ado was made among Chinese revolutionaries about how “one divides into two.” Indeed, this is the most important aspect of dialectics. All things contain contradictions. In a capitalist world, one of the major contradictions is that between the proletariat — those who live wholly or mainly by selling their labor-power — and the capitalists, who buy the labor-power of the proletariat and exploit their labor. There is also a contradiction between imperialist nations and oppressed nations, a contradiction between humans and their environment, contradictions within the proletariat and within the capitalist class themselves, contradictions within the Marxist movement, contradictions within reactionary movements, etc. The fundamental point is this: all things are made up of two aspects which are constantly in struggle with one another, and these struggling contradictions make up a unified whole. When two aspects within a unified whole are struggling against one another, we call this a “unity of opposites” or “dialectical unity.”

The nature of change: quantitative to qualitative

The world is constantly changing. The direction of motion of something is fundamentally determined by the interplay between the contradictions within that thing. For example, the direction in which the

world moves today is in large part determined by the struggle between the imperialist nations and the oppressed nations.

The way in which things move is from quantitative change to qualitative change. A *quantitative* change is a small, almost imperceptible change that does not alter the fundamental aspects of something. A *qualitative* change is a sudden leap that changes the essence of a thing. The world moves by accumulating quantitative changes, until they accumulate to the point where a sudden, qualitative leap occurs.

A good analogy is the boiling of water. If water is resting at 50 degrees C, and I increase the temperature to 51 degrees C, the water is still water. This is a *quantitative* change. However, I can keep making these quantitative changes, increasing the temperature degree by degree, to 60 degrees, 70 degrees, and so on, until I reach 100 degrees C. At this point, a sudden leap occurs. The water begins boiling. This is a *qualitative* change. Water becomes steam. A number of quantitative changes, which individually did not fundamentally alter the essence of the water, eventually accumulated to the point where a sudden, qualitative leap occurred: the water turned into steam.

Dialectics holds that all change operates in this manner. An example is how class consciousness is attained among the proletariat in a capitalist society. The interplay of the contradictions within society make almost imperceptible, quantitative changes that affect workers’ thinking. But eventually, the accumulation of those quantitative changes begets a *qualitative* leap: at a certain point, the proletariat breaks with the capitalist order, and it overthrows the capitalist class.

Principal and secondary contradictions

As already mentioned, contradictions exist in all things. But in a complex system of many contradictions, one of these contradictions is necessarily the *principal* one. That is, at any given moment, one contradiction is the main one which plays the dominant role in shaping the way things change. Other contradictions are secondary contradictions. This is not to say that the secondary contradictions do not matter or have no effect on the world. Secondary contradictions are important, but they play a subsidiary role and are mediated by the principal contradiction.

For instance, the principal contradiction globally today is that between imperialism and the oppressed nations. The struggle between the interests of imperialist nations, who seek to ransack the world and exploit the labor of the oppressed nations, and the interests of the oppressed nations themselves is the main contradiction which affects how things change in the world. Some secondary contradictions are those between the bourgeoisie and proletariat in individual countries, and contradictions between imperialist countries (i.e. inter-imperialist rivalry). It is incorrect to say that all of these contradictions play an equal role in how the world is changing currently. But it is also incorrect to say that only one contradiction matters. Thus, we recognize that all of these contradictions affect how the world changes, but one of them is necessarily the dominant one, and at the current moment, that is the contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed nations.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember here is that which contradiction is principal and which contradictions are secondary can and does change with time. The principal contradiction now may be a secondary contradiction later. We must always be mindful of this and have an up-to-date analysis of what contradiction is the principal one, because this has profound implications for where we devote our energies and how we form revolutionary strategy.

If all of this is still not clear, here is one more example. The principal contradiction in the world today is that between imperialism and the oppressed nations. This means that national liberation struggles in the oppressed nations have a progressive character because they help undermine imperialism. Yet, there are also other contradictions to consider, such as the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the oppressed nations, and the contradictions within the bourgeoisie itself. National liberation struggles can be led by the national bourgeoisie — that section of the bourgeoisie in oppressed nations which opposes imperialism. Even these bourgeois nationalist struggles are progressive in the sense that they can help undermine imperialism. But are struggles led by the national bourgeoisie really effective in the long run? The national bourgeoisie has a vacillating character when it comes to imperialism. They oppose it when it interferes with their profits, but once in power, the national bour-

geoisie may support imperialism if it gives them a bigger cut. Moreover, the national bourgeoisie of course still exploits its “own” proletariat. Thus, being mindful of the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the contradictions within the bourgeoisie itself, and combining this with our knowledge of the principal contradiction today, we come to the following conclusion: the task for revolutionaries in the oppressed nations is to merge the struggle for socialism with national liberation struggles. The primary task is to undermine imperialism, and the best way to do this — the *only* way to do this in the long run — is to fight for socialism. That is to say, the task is to foster proletarian-led national liberation struggles. This is an example of how dialectics, and in particular an appreciation of principal and secondary contradictions, leads us to conclusions about the strategy and tactics for communists today.

Principal and secondary aspects of a contradiction

Within a single contradiction, there are two aspects struggling against each other. Necessarily, one is always dominant over the other. If the two aspects are ever in equilibrium, it is only for a fleeting moment. One aspect out of the two is always playing a dominant role or a secondary role in how society changes. Thus, we say there are principal and secondary *aspects* of every contradiction.

A clear example of this is the line that demarcates socialism from capitalism. We know that societies are constantly changing. This is as true of capitalism as it is of socialism. Thus it is difficult, really impossible, to demarcate socialism from capitalism using only *de jure* “benchmarks” as one’s guide. A dialectical view is that cap-

italism is a society where the bourgeoisie and its interests are in command; a socialist society is one where the proletariat and its interests are in command. In other words, in the context of the class contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, a capitalist society is one where the class interest of the bourgeoisie is the principal aspect. A socialist society is one where the class interest of the proletariat is the principal aspect.

Antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions

Antagonistic contradictions are essentially those that cannot be resolved within the context of the current order of the world, those which require revolution to be resolved. Non-antagonistic contradictions are those which can be handled without great social upheaval. In a socialist society, it is of utmost importance to know the difference between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. The contradictions within the proletariat and other progressive classes are non-antagonistic. They can be resolved in the context of socialism and to some extent are healthy, as line struggle is an essential part of determining correct policies. On the other hand, the contradiction between the proletariat and the enemies of the people, the bourgeoisie (or the comprador bourgeoisie in oppressed nations) is an antagonistic contradiction that must be handled with force. This contradiction should be suppressed and the material basis for the contradiction should be eliminated from both above and below. Treating the contradictions within the proletariat and other progressive classes like antagonistic ones is detrimental. Treating the contradictions between the people and their enemies as non-antagonistic is also detrimental and spells the end of socialism. We must always be mindful of

which contradictions are antagonistic and which are not.

Learning to think dialectically

Dialectics is an unusual method of thinking at first for many people in the western world. It may take some time for one to feel like s/he has a good grasp of it. A good way to go about this is simply to take a look at the works of skilled dialecticians, in particular Lenin and Mao (for example, Mao’s *On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People*). One can also look at the arguments of modern-day Marxists which purport to be dialectical and judge whether they really apply dialectics, keeping in mind the principles discussed in this primer. The best way to learn is of course to try it yourself. While dialectics may seem foreign at first, it is a powerful tool for Marxist theory that can be used to understand the present and to develop coherent theory which will guide effective practice into the future.

- Morton Esters

Further Reading:

Dialectical and Historical Materialism — J.V. Stalin

The M-L-M Basic Course by People’s March, Section 27: Mao on Philosophy

Examples of Dialectics — a compilation made in a Red Guard publication

On Contradiction — Mao Zedong



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Long Live the Revolutionary Spirit of Lin Biao!

Lin Biao, a prominent leftist of the Chinese Revolution, was born on December 5, 1907. A graduate of Whampoa Military Academy, then headed up by Chiang Kai-shek, Lin defected to the Red Army following the 1927 split between the Communists and Kuomintang and became known as one of the CCP's most effective and efficient field commanders. At the height of his acclaim during the Cultural Revolution, Lin was the vice-chair of the Communist Party and Mao's political successor. In 1971, he mysteriously died. The 'official line' claims Lin's plane crashed while attempting to flee China following a failed coup against Mao. Since then, revisionists both inside and outside of China have posthumously attacked Lin Biao and his revolutionary line.

Politically, the spirit of Lin Biao's life was revolutionary. Lin was an early proponent not simply of the Cultural Revolution, but also of the politicization of the military under socialist lines. As the editor of the Little Red Book, Lin sought to make the essential aspects of revolutionary politics accessible to soldiers, peasants, and workers alike, emboldening their political action.

Perhaps Lin Biao's primary political contribution was laid out in *Long Live the Victory of People's War!*. The essay discussed the history, strategies, and tactics of China's 22-year-long people's war, looked at its international applicability for people throughout the Third World, and applied it generally, and somewhat allegorically, to the world situation. Summarizing China's foreign policy model, Lin declared, "the socialist countries should regard it as their internationalist duty to support the people's revolutionary struggles in Asia, Africa, and Latin America."

According to Lin, the leadership of the Soviet Union had abandoned this "internationalist duty." Not only had a new bourgeoisie seized the reigns of power in the Soviet Union, but it was engaged in de facto collusion with US imperialism toward the end of joint domination of the world. The Soviet Union, Lin argued, offered only token aid to revolutionary and national liberation movements worldwide. The CCP had already determined the USSR's line on the 'peaceful co-existence' of capitalism

and socialism was untenable and revisionist – a poisonous ideological weed within the international communist movement and among oppressed people. Lin's solution was for China to embark on a universal foreign policy strategy: broad support by the socialist camp for people's wars launched against lackeys of US-led imperialism; and the treatment of the Soviet Union as a secondary enemy to US-led imperialism. The massive force of people's wars and national liberation struggles would, Lin hoped, pressure to leadership of the Soviet Union into a progressive position (at least until its capitalist-roader leadership



could be overthrown via cultural revolution). This same foreign policy, which hoped to achieve a global people's war against US-led imperialism, also sought to hasten the development of revolutionary movements in the imperialist centers themselves.

It is possible the essay was written by someone else (perhaps Chen Boda) and merely attributed to Lin Biao. However, it is unlikely Lin would have agreed to this without supporting (for one reason or other) the promotion of its content.

The fall of Lin Biao would mark a turn for the worse in China's domestic and foreign policy. Mass spontaneity and the revolutionary politicization of institutions and social life across China would slowly halt. China dropped global people's war as a leading theoretical benchmark of foreign policy and began to adopt 'three worlds theory,' which saw the United States and Soviet Union as equal enemies of the

world's people. In practice, soon after Lin's death, China began a rapprochement with the United States, and in February 1972 Richard Nixon became the first US president to visit the PRC. The three worlds theory, adopted as a foreign policy model only after Lin's demise, objectively and practically put China on the side of US-led imperialism, exactly what the CCP (and Lin) had critiqued the CPSU for several years earlier.

In the 42 years since Lin's death, it has become fashionable among revisionists to pin all the errors of the Chinese left on Lin

Biao. Certainly, Lin was guilty of committing the errors of triumphalism, militarism, voluntarism, and promoting the cult of personality around Mao. These were not the errors of Lin alone, however. Instead, these errors were shared by much of the Chinese left during the Cultural Revolution, including Mao himself.

It is hard (if not impossible) to be certain about the specific causes and events surrounding Lin's death. Even if he did attempt a coup against Mao, perhaps this would not have been a bad thing. Given Mao's slide to the right, perhaps sidelining him in some fashion could have further isolated figures like Deng Xiaoping and maintained China's foreign policy of global support for people's war against US-led imperialism. Moreover, even if Lin was at fault: so what? This single act does not invalidate the revolutionary line previously associated with his name no more than does the winding down of the cultural revolution and adoption of the 'three worlds theory'-based foreign policy invalidate Maoism at large.

In 2013, to uphold the revolutionary legacy of Lin Biao is to uphold the importance of people's war, a proletarian-led global united front, the dictatorship of the proletariat, a revolutionary foreign policy of socialist states, and the necessity of enlisting mass struggle to combat the 'new bourgeoisie' which develops under socialism. As capitalist-imperialism is once again exposing itself as the common enemy of the world's masses, it is this spirit of revolutionary Marxism which will illuminate this century's struggle for global communism.

- Nikolai Brown



Some Points on Syria, Inter-Imperialist Rivalry, and Communist Work

1) Regardless of how the situation developed, the current civil war amounts to a proxy-conflict between decrepit US-led imperialism (represented through the US and its Arabian allies) and a developing bloc of ‘Eastern’ monopoly capital (publicly represented primarily by Russia).

2) Whether Assad or the ‘rebels’ win, a certain debt will be owed and Syria will be pulled into either imperialist blocs’ orbit, albeit, the victory of Assad and Russian interests will be less costly in the immediate-term for the Syrian people.

3) The principal contradiction is between imperialism and oppressed nations. However, we cannot ignore historical circumstance as it relates to the struggle of oppressed peoples. Therefore, it is inevitable that the proletariat can and must, in certain circumstances, engage in temporary alliances with one particular bloc of monopoly capitalists against another as a matter of strategic exigency.

4) The job of Communists in the First World is not primarily to outline courses of action for Third World Communists.

That said, our own strategic analysis of the situation is that Syrian liberation forces would be best to form a united front against fighters sponsored by representatives of US-led imperialism. This implies Syrian Communists should remain independent from the Assad-led government while nonetheless fighting against so-called ‘rebels.’ Only by entering the conflict in an independent yet decisive way can Syrian Communists establish themselves as a leading force for the liberation of the Syrian people.

5) The principal job of Communists in the First World vis-a-vis proxy-conflicts such as Syria is to organize for ‘revolutionary defeatism.’ That is to say, Communists should organize for a defeat of their ‘own’ imperialists in a way that advances the revolutionary struggle both domestically and internationally. Practically speaking, Western Communists should be working to counter efforts by US-led imperialism to further escalate the conflict; and Communists should foremost call on representatives of US-led imperialism to end its support for terroristic ‘rebels’ inside Syria. Communists in the United States

should specifically call for the defeat of US-led imperialism in this proxy conflict and avoid propagating narratives which build public support for US-led intervention.

6) The US may already be partially defeated: the same ‘international community’ which it boldly claimed would ‘stand up to Assad’ has instead rejected the Yankkkee drive to further escalate the conflict. The United States’ aggressive momentum was also stymied by the involvement of immature Russia-led ‘Eastern’ monopoly capital, which has thus far maneuvered diplomatically to prevent a US-led direct military action.

7) US-led imperialism is increasingly decadent and moribund. Having lost its productive edge within the world economy, US-led imperialism is increasingly reliant on a few key monopolies, including: ‘dollar hegemony,’ global energy supplies; extensive influence over international discourse, communication, and intelligence networks; and the size and scope of its military capabilities vis-a-vis other countries and blocs. US-led imperialism has entered an economic ‘death spiral.’ Rather than investing in productive and social innovation as a means of competing in the world economy, it is increasingly invested into these few monopolistic (and often times wholly unproductive) economic sectors in order to desperately cling to its dominance over global class structures. The development of Russian and Chinese monopoly capital occurred because of two specific conditions: first, both have large territories with plentiful supplies of natural resources and human labor; second, historic and recent political initiatives have been aimed at retaining surplus and competing with the power of US-led imperialism. While moralistic value judgments on Western versus Eastern imperialism should be avoided, strategies which incorporate and play off their growing rivalry should be utilized.

8) Periods of heightening inter-imperialist rivalry sharpen antagonisms and strengthen global revolutionary potential. Generally speaking, it is the task of Communists to fight to overthrow the bourgeoisie in all realms, including the realm of ideas. In the First World, one of the principal tasks for

Communists is building public opinion in support of the struggles of oppressed and exploited peoples, another is to challenge normative ideas (including chauvinism, reformism, First Worldism, etc.) reflective of parasitism. Still another is to build independent institutions which serve the interests of the oppressed people and challenge to power of imperialism.

9) As a movement for revolution, Communism is practically expressed according to particular conditions. It is anarchistic and dogmatic to assume Communist movements in Western imperialist countries would utilize the same strategies and tactics, let alone slogans, as the Communist movement in Kurdistan or Damascus. Slogans such as ‘Neither Assad nor US intervention’ on the part of Western ‘Communists’ are incorrect: they assume some influence on conditions in Syria other than through opposing the US’ ongoing proxy war. For Communists in the West, the slogan of ‘No Western Intervention’ is sufficient whereas slogans against Assad can only serve to legitimize and advance narratives as part of a lead up for greater escalation by US-led imperialism.

10) Comrades associated with websites such as Anti-Imperialism.com have long done our part to oppose the US side of the conflict. Unfortunately, there is a malignant trend of First Worldist ‘Maoism’ which fails time after time to recognize the development of color revolutions as they occur. Whether it is the RCPUSA’s indirect support of US-led aggression against Muslim peoples or Kasama’s support of the so-called ‘Green Revolution,’ this trend consistently underestimates US-led imperialism, its parasitic nature, and its basic history. The Maoist Internationalist Movement described the backwards viewpoint as crypto-Trotskyism. Crypto-Trotskyism, far from understanding global class dynamics, actually believes the labor aristocracy to be a leading force of revolution. This trend (crypto-Trotskyism; First Worldism) should be opposed politically, especially in its rallying of public opinion in service of US-led aggression.

- Nikolai Brown



The Prison-Industrial Complex and the Class Struggle

The state, as we understand it, functions as a tool of class suppression: the instrument by which the ruling classes suppresses other classes. As Marx described the state:

“The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party”

Despite liberal slogans about the ‘objective’ nature of government and the ‘rule of law’ we know that the bourgeois state functions as a tool for the capitalist class. This relationship between the capitalist class and their state functionaries helps shape all things within the realm of the state ideology and administration of the law. One clear manifestation of this rela-

tionship is the development of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) and its subsequent processes within Amerikan society.

First, let us outline what exactly the Prison Industrial Complex is. The PIC is a term used to describe the socio-political interests and beneficiaries surrounding private prisons, the use of prison labor, and rising incarceration within the United States. So when speaking of the PIC it is important to understand it is not just one “thing” but an embodiment of “things” including economic processes, social realities, and political interests related to the modern Amerikan penal system.

While exploited labor and various forms of slavery have never been alien to the Amerikan experience, the PIC has been a rather recent development. Prior to the early 1980s most prisons were state-run and not

leased in any for-profit nature. While oppressive mechanisms most obviously existed (including the leasing of convict-labor to local businesses as early as the Reconstruction Era) the explicitly exploitative function of the PIC had not fully matured [1]. This changed during the War on Drugs when ‘fiscal conservatives’ introduced the idea of leasing prison administration to private institutions causing the number of prisoners in these for-profit prisons to jump 1600% [2]. The idea was genius. Politicians were able to collect points with the majority White electorate by shifting the ‘burden’ of the majority non-White prison population (affected hugely by the parallel War on Drugs) onto private stockholders. These private investors were elated to find a marginalized prison population whom they could pay far below minimum wage (if anything) with

On Inter-Imperialist Rivalry and ‘Eastern Imperialism’

Discussion has been sparked by a recent article posted at Anti-Imperialism.com about the situation in Syria. Particularly, some of the feedback questioned the nature and existence of Russian and Chinese imperialism. The following is part of a correspondence which briefly deals with the development of monopoly capital outside of the post-WWII trilateral bloc of the US/Canada, Britain/Western Europe and Japan.

I think it is evident that Chinese capital is increasingly involved and invested in foreign and far away places, Africa being a prime example (China is now the continent’s top trading partner), but also Latin America and its Asian-Pacific neighbors. This certainly isn’t a form of benevolence, but Chinese capital probably offers more benefits and better terms of trade than, say, France or the US.

The question of whether China is a net-importer or exporter of surplus value is, I believe, separate, as it is a lagging indicator of imperialism. I don’t think resources will be available for Russian/Chinese capital to create as large a labor aristocracy as has historically existed in post-WWII imperialist countries.

While it would be hyperbole (and liberal) to describe Russia/Chinese imperialism on

par with US-led imperialism, I think we have to remember that society is constantly in a state of motion. In this case, we have to look at particulars to understand which bloc is in decay due to its inherent contradictions (US-led imperialism) and which is ascendant and attempting to ‘fill the void’ (Russia/Chinese capital). Obviously, a qualitative change in power dynamics between these two blocs won’t occur smoothly, and I believe what we are seeing in Syria is primarily an expression of the conflict between these two blocs. Interestingly, US-led imperialism has already been dealt a blow by the ‘international community’s’ refusal to back its aggression. Again, this might have something to do with the fact that Russia and China have been pouring money into global media outlets which challenge the Washington-London-Tokyo narrative.

Getting into this a bit more... I think US-led imperialism is increasingly decadent, i.e. increasing invested into the means of maintaining rule and realizing value at the expense of investing in developing the means of production to create new value [or rather, which utilize labor more efficiently thus producing greater amounts of surplus]. Materially speaking, countries such China, Russia, Brazil, etc. have large resource bases and huge productive

populations. Over the course of decades and given political initiatives enough capital can be accumulated to create competing monopolies.

With regards to Syria, I think there is a thin line between comprador and national bourgeoisie. Often times, compradors will have to take (usually superficial cultural) nationalist measures as a way of achieving some popular support. Likewise, even progressive bourgeois nationalist governments (i.e. Cuba, Venezuela, Iran) rely on popular domestic cross-class coalitions while nonetheless operating within the world-economy.

If anything, I think the developing competing Russian/Chinese monopoly bloc adds an interesting dynamism which is both inevitable yet has been lacking since the 1930s.

All of this said, strategy is necessary in all circumstances. US-led imperialism is still the principal enemy of the world’s people. However, it is increasingly upstart Russian/Chinese monopoly capital which is emerging as the primary threat to its hegemony—not the world’s masses per se. The challenge, I suppose, is maneuvering between the two to create, through struggle, a better alternative.



- Nikolai Brown

no benefits and no weekends; effectively extracting the most surplus value possible. The PIC thus expanded to where it is today with the United States having the highest incarceration rates in the entire world.

Some ask what role does prison labor even have? Contrary to pop culture, prison labor is more than license plate production. In fact, scores of US companies take advantage of this lucrative labor supply including Proctor and Gamble, Motorola, Johnson and Johnson, Amway Corporation, Wal-Mart, Keystone Automotive Industries, International Paper etc. The list goes on and on indicating that prison labor is far more than imprinting some steel to stick on a car bumper. One interesting usage of prison labor is for the production of military supplies. Military contractor UNICOR leases prison labor to fulfill a multi-million dollar contract with the Pentagon which involves producing everything from helmets and dog tags to electrical components for surface-to-air missiles [3]. All at the bargain wage rate of USD 0.23/hr [4].

On top of being able to pay workers next to nothing for their labor, many businesses actually receive a state reimbursement on wages paid, sometimes as much as 40% [5].

However, the industries leasing labor are not the only entities profiting off the PIC. There are hundreds of smaller companies who have been contracted to provide basic services to inmates, often making a substantial profit for themselves.

None of this includes nearly the greatest beneficiary of the PIC being the parasitic labor unions which represent the officials working inside the system. One example would be the California Correctional Peace Officer's Association, or the CCPOA. Guards working inside this union usually make around USD 72,400/yr (40% above national average for the same profession) presiding over prisoners laboring at somewhere between USD 1.00-5.00/day. Now if a guard were to work overtime he could rake in as much as USD 100,000/yr. It then becomes clear why the CCPOA spends USD 8 million annually lobbying against measures to reduce sentencing for non-violent crimes [6].

Now clearly prisons are a subsequent institution of any class society but something

must be said about the clear profiteering of these 'labor' groups off the systematic oppression and exploitation of prisoners. This sort of exploitation highlights the processes within the capitalist mode of production which align swaths of laborers with the capitalist class; observed in the broader labor aristocracy.



Back onto the original point. We know that the PIC has become extremely profitable for many entities. What does this mean to the class struggle as a whole?

The PIC does more for the capitalist class than function as a highly profitable labor process. The PIC has effectively created colonies within the Empire. Meaning these prisons have become functioning colonies of cheap labor, effectively isolated from the whole of the working class.

This allows Amerikan companies to produce many products 'domestically' while still maintaining a healthy rate of profit.

In addition, the isolated nature of prison labor ensures a degree of spatial apathy from the working class as a whole. This subliminal yet deeply cultural apathy is similar to what can be observed from 'labor' organizations in Amerika in regard to super-exploitation in the periphery. The bourgeois have created an 'outgroup' within the core 'working class' in the same way core-centric 'labor' has posited the periphery. Parallel with 'crime' on one hand and 'maldevelopment' on the other, we see bourgeois ideology rationalize this super-exploitation as both deserved and inevitable.

In this way the bourgeois can continue on with their consumer society, physically abstracting the contradictions of capital accumulation from the core.

This is why I use the term 'colony' to describe the way in which the PIC contributes to the imperialist system at large. The vast majority of the core remains socially

if not spatially 'distant' from the exploitative processes of monopoly capitalism. It then becomes easier for the core 'working class' to become embourgeoisified to the point it has.

All of this should lead us to a few conclusions regarding the PIC and the class struggle as a whole.

First, the PIC has a dual nature in how it relates to monopoly capitalism, especially within the core; not only to provide colonial-esque exploitation within the Empire but abstract 'mainstream labour' from concrete exploitation.

Second, prisoners within this system constitute one of the most systematically oppressed and exploited groups within the core.

Third, the exploited of the PIC must be considered an ally of the global working class and a base for revolutionary potential within Amerika alongside other marginalized, exploited, and oppressed peoples.

Thus it is important to analyze the PIC not as a corrupt institution but as a functioning mechanism of imperialist-capitalism; understanding not only how it moves within the mode of production but how it shapes the class struggle as a whole. With this knowledge we can better hope to apply correct theory, organize effectively, consolidate our victories, and advance the global people's struggle; ultimately to break the old and build anew.

- Zak Drabczyk

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Evidence for Global Value Transfer

[Editor's note: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, hereafter referred to as OECD, is comprised of thirty-four countries around the world which, accounting for 78% of world GDP and only 18% of the world population, represent the First World.]

While most recognize the existence of imperialism, many are unwilling to understand the accompanying processes. One of these processes, one that we have fought hard to reassert, is what we call *imperialist rent*: the way in which First World (core) wages/income/etc. are appropriated from Third World (periphery) exploitation.

To provide evidence for this process, calculations from Zak Cope's *Divided World, Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism** have been provided which show estimates of value transfer from the Third to the First World. A series of original graphs have also been provided to help illustrate some of the data to the reader.

Absolute and Relative Surplus Value

The production of surplus value is directly related to the rate of exploitation of workers in the workplace (total surplus value divided by wages). There are essentially two ways to increase this rate.

The production of absolute surplus value entails an increase in the amount of total value produced, usually by increasing the workday of workers, but also by intensifying the work done, by limiting breaks, supervision by management, and so on. This form of increase in surplus value is limited in its usefulness, since there are natural limits to it, such as the 24 hours of the day, but also the social limits, such as the moral welfare of the working population.

The production of relative surplus value, however, doesn't suffer from these limita-



Below is that data. Keep in mind these are only a few pieces of evidence in a spacious field of research. Far more data exists, and more evidence will continue to appear.

NOTE: All math done is the work of Dr. Cope, not my own.

To determine the real value transfer from the unequal exchange of commodities

(equal cost prices but different labor values) a few steps must be taken.

1. Determine the price value of non-OECD exports to the OECD [1].

Nominal World GDP was 62.2 trillion (USD) of which 34.2 trillion was in world trade. Non-OECD exports to the OECD accounted for 7.7 trillion in GDP. Considering 15% of non-OECD exports are ser-

tions, making it the main way of increasing surplus value for the capitalist. Relative surplus value is produced through the reduction of the value of labor power (variable capital) by means of improvements in the production of goods (effectively the appropriation of productivity gains by the capitalist class). In this case, with the working day and wage remaining the same, the value of labor power falls leaving a higher surplus value. There are several ways to achieve this result, such as introduction of better machinery, a better organization of the workplace, and so on.

- Klaas Velja



Production of absolute surplus value:

←	v	→←	s	→← s' →
0		5		10	11 hours of labour

Before technical change:

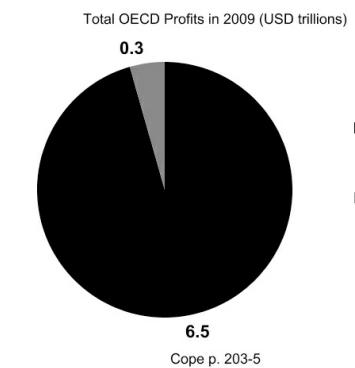
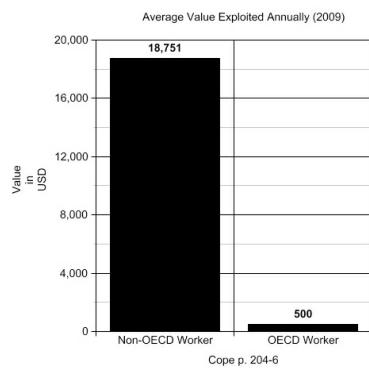
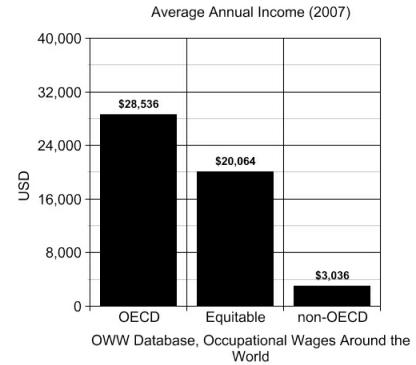
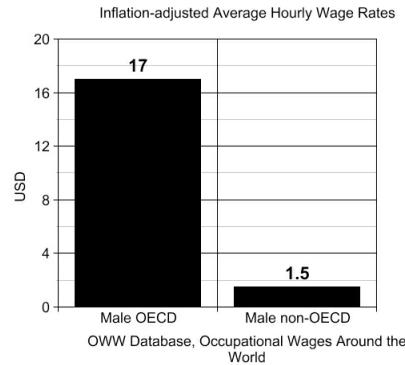
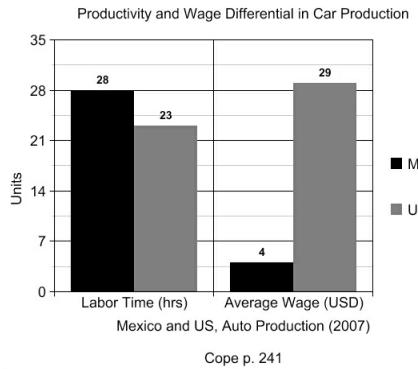
←	v	→←	s	→
0		5		10 hours of labour

After technical change (lower value of labor power):

←	v'	→←	s'	→
0		4		10 hours of labour



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vices, and about half of these go to the OECD, this means that non-OECD goods exports to the OECD are worth about 7 trillion.

2. Determine the portion of non-OECD export sector goods prices that is value-added domestically and the weighted average of OECD goods-producing labour productivity (value added divided by hourly wages in domestic industry and agriculture) and non-OECD to OECD goods-export sector productivity [2].

Considering that 37% of total OECD exports to the non-OECD are intermediate goods, and capital goods consume 25% of the same sum, then we can estimate the value-added domestically of non-OECD exports to the OECD to be about 35% (following the assumption that intermediary and capital goods are destined for re-export, a line that favors the Euro-Marxist argument of lower Third World productivity). Because non-OECD goods exports to the OECD consume about 40% of non-OECD GDP, IMF calculations indicate that around 1 billion non-OECD laborers must be involved in the sector exporting goods to the OECD. When we weigh this number by our domestic value-added (35%) we find that around 350 million non-OECD workers are involved in producing goods for the OECD market. If each works 1400 hours annually (the average number worked by a non-OECD laborer, including figures of underemployment) then this means 490 billion hours are expended annually on the production of non-OECD goods exported to the OECD. Using the same methodology we can determine that the OECD goods production sector works approximately 256 billion hours per year. This means it required 746 billion hours to generate the 20 trillion (USD) of which 7 trillion was from non-OECD exports and 13 trillion from OECD goods production. While male wage rates between the OECD and non-OECD hover

at a ratio of 11:1, the average productivity according to this methodology is about 2.9.

3. Divide the price of non-OECD exports to the OECD at the weighted mean “productivity” by their actual price [3].

Here we shall use a formula to determine the ‘real’ value-transfer of the non-OECD to the OECD in goods.

$$t = -vp + vdp + p + evd / p + evd$$

Where t is the uncompensated value-transfer from the unequal exchange, v is the value-added percentage for non-OECD exports, p is the total goods value-added produced in the OECD, d is the OECD-non-OECD export sector price-value distortion parameter (productivity ratio) and e is the actual price of non-OECD goods exports to the OECD.

This calculation shows a net value transfer to the OECD of approximately 2.8 trillion (USD) annually through unequal exchange in commodities *alone*.

However, this is not the only form of global value-transfer.

Assuming the principal of equalizing wage rates we can estimate the value-transferred to the core regions from the relative underpayment of labour-power in the non-OECD countries [4].

The 500 million non-OECD workers receive wages worth about 1.5 trillion (USD) annually or \$3,036 on average. This consumes about 8% of non-OECD GDP

(2010). The combined wages of the 600 million OECD workers equates to about 17 trillion or \$28,536 on average. This consumes about 38% of OECD GDP (2010). Ergo, the wage-share of non-OECD export product prices to the OECD is worth 616 billion (8% of 7.7 trillion) and the wage-share of OECD export prices to the non-OECD is approximately 2.8 trillion (38% of 7.3 trillion). Understanding the average ratio in wages between the OECD and non-OECD is 11:1, we can deduce an *average wage factor*.

OECD workers: 600 million at factor 11 = 6.6 billion

Non-OECD workers: 500 million at factor 1 = 500 million

Total number: 1.1 billion at average factor = 7.1 billion

Average wage factor: 7.1 billion / 1.1 billion = 6.5

This factor represents the mean average wage rate pertaining between male workers in the OECD and non-OECD [5].

If paid by this average wage rate the wage-share of exports would then be worth:

Non-OECD, 4.4 trillion (616 billion x 6.5/1)

OECD, 1.7 trillion (2.8 trillion x 6.5/11)

Now we can determine the ‘real’ price of exports by adding the adjusted totals to the remaining production costs.

Summary and Review: ‘Global Wage Scaling and Left Ideology: A Critique of Charlie Post on the Labor Aristocracy’ Zak Cope (2013)

Not long ago, a PDF of Charlie Post’s 2010 essay, *Exploring Working-Class Consciousness: A Critique of the Theory of the Labor Aristocracy*,¹ was circulated around the internet. Though I was aware of the essay, the contorted logic of the abstract stymied my inclination to read further. Post introduces his work as thus:

The notion of the labour-aristocracy is one of the oldest Marxian explanations of working-class conservatism and reformism. Despite its continued appeal to scholars and activists on the Left, there is no single, coherent theory of the labour-aristocracy. While all versions argue working class conservatism and reformism reflects the politics of a privileged layer of workers who share in ‘monopoly’ super-profits, they differ on the sources of those super-profits: national dominance of the world-market in the nineteenth century

(Marx and Engels), imperialist investments in the ‘colonial world’/global South (Lenin and Zinoviev), or corporate monopoly in the twentieth century (Elbaum and Seltzer). ***The existence of a privileged layer of workers who share monopoly super-profits with the capitalist class cannot be empirically verified.*** [bold mine]

For Post, the fact that there is “no single, coherent theory of the labour-aristocracy” weakens the case for its existence. This is plainly absurd. “No single, coherent theory” exists regarding capitalism, oppression, and class struggle, yet they no doubt exist (along with all sorts of social phenomenon for which there is no “single, coherent” explanation). Moreover, outside of ‘Marxist’ circles, the idea and existence of the ‘labor aristocracy’ is evident and commonly known, albeit regarding an area of social life not deeply investigated or discussed. Without reading past the ab-

stract, I could only imagine the logical back-flips and national chauvinism Post would employ to build his case against the existence of a ‘labor-aristocracy.’

The manner in which Post frames his argument is significant as well. Post’s arguments are not directed against contemporary Third Worldists but against the ‘theory of the labor-aristocracy’ as outlined in the past.¹ By touting the fact that there are many interpretations of the labor-aristocracy throughout history, Post is able to avoid the most rigorous, far-reaching, and recent among them. While First Worldists (such as Post) may attempt to use such arguments against contemporary Third Worldists (such as Cope, myself, and others), they miss their mark, essentially building a straw-man argument against a bygone proto-Third Worldism which is no longer sufficient at explaining global class structures. Significantly, Post ignores many arguments put forward by today’s Third Worldists on the fundamen-

(Continued: Global Value Transfer)

Exports from non-OECD to OECD: 11.5 trillion (USD)

Exports from OECD to non-OECD: 6.2 trillion (USD)

Therefore we can determine that from low import prices the OECD receives 3.8 trillion (USD) from the non-OECD (11.5 trillion – 7.7 trillion) and from high export prices 1.1 trillion (7.3 trillion – 6.2 trillion). In total, this means a global value transfer in trade of 4.9 trillion annually.

Now let us make some final calculations. Considering the trade deficit, total OECD profits amounted to about 6.8 trillion (USD). If we add the average value of unequal exchange to the OECD, 3.9 trillion (2.8 trillion + 4.9 trillion / 2), and the value of capital exported to the OECD (including debt payments, weighed for wage rates), 2.6 trillion, we find that the total value of unequal exchange plus capital export equates to 6.5 trillion. Roughly 95.5% of OECD profits can be accounted for from the exploitation of the non-OECD.

In short, the material wealth and high wages of the First World are rather directly

built off the superprofits extracted from the Third World.

Now, let’s make a few points. Nowhere in this article is it claimed that the First World is populated solely by leeching parasites who are the eternal enemy of the working class. Rather, this evidence indicates how the wealth of the labor aristocracy is appropriated from the exploitation of the global working class, residing largely in the periphery. While the workers of the core are not capitalists in class, they do empirically benefit from the processes of imperialism. This reality should not discourage us from organizing core workers but rather guide our strategy in doing so.

In the end, if you’re a communist like me, then this information should be moving. The social reality of imperialism seems all but undeniable at this point. The question is, what shall we do with this knowledge? We can ignore it, continue down the path of core-centric thought, and forfeit real socialist revolution. Or, we can embrace this knowledge, reanalyze our material conditions, reassess class nature, and redefine how we struggle against imperialism and towards a socialist future.

As Che Guevara said:

Our every action is a battle cry against imperialism, and a battle hymn for the people’s unity against the great enemy of mankind: the United States of America.

**I strongly encourage all readers to purchase Dr. Cope’s book. It has been instrumental in my own understanding of political economy and all the credit to him for the time and research it took to compile such a work.*

- Zak Drabczyk

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- [1] Cope, Zak. 2012. Kersplebedeb. *Divided World, Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism*.
- [2] Ibid. p. 185
- [3] Ibid. p. 186
- [4] Ibid. p. 192
- [5] Ibid. p. 195-7



tal role of net-exploitation in the capitalist world-economy.

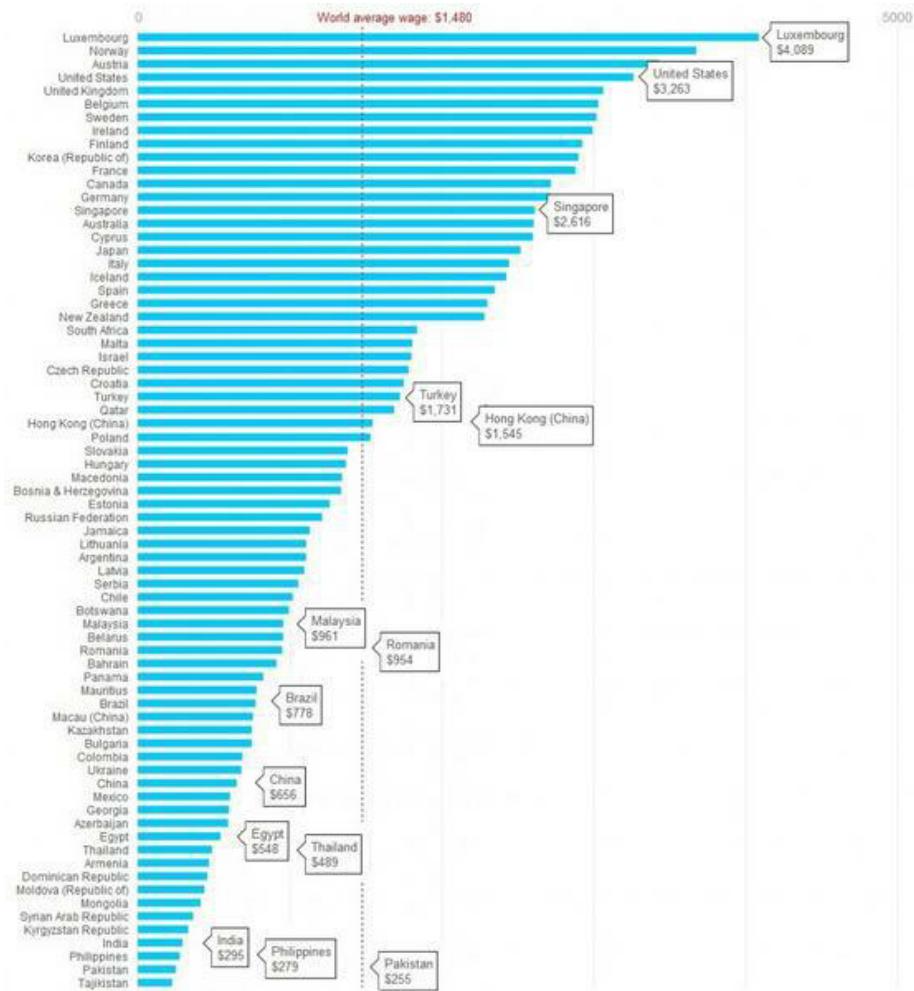
Zak Cope, author of *Divided World, Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labor under Capitalism*, wrote a thorough and convincing critique of Post's miscalculated effort at disproving the existence of the labor aristocracy. Those who have already read *Divided Work, Divided Class* will be pleased to know this most recent polemical essay is not a mere rehash of the book. Instead, Cope's critique of Post is more theoretical and discusses Marxism and political economy with more depth.

Cope begins his essay by refuting Post's premise of critiquing a pre-Third Worldist view of the 'labor-aristocracy.' Cope argues,

Post is certainly correct that the position of the labour aristocracy was, and is, precarious and in flux. Indeed, as reflected in hidebound theory, it has been a recurrent weakness of the Marxian position on the labour aristocracy to assume that what Marx, Engels and Lenin sometimes suggested in their fragmentary and century-old analyses were its major characteristics, in particular, its being a thin upper stratum of highly skilled and organised male labour in any given nation, must remain unchanged. In fact, application of the Marxist method demonstrates how the evolution of the labour aristocracy is intrinsically bound up with the historical development of the class struggle as waged internationally, in particular, with the increasing incorporation of super-exploitation into the circuit of capital. (93-94)

Drawing from a materialist perspective, Cope highlights via a quote from Canadian historian Leften Stavrianos the very real, historical link between the base, structure, and super-structure of capitalist-imperialism:

[S]oap, margarine, chocolate, cocoa and rubber tires for bicycles. All of these commodities required large-scale imports from tropical regions, which in turn necessitated local infrastructures of harbours, railways, steamers, trucks, warehouses, machinery and telegraph and postal systems. Such infrastructures required order and security to ensure adequate dividends to shareholders. Hence the clamour for annexation if local conflicts disrupted the flow of trade, or if a neighbouring colonial power threatened to expand. (98)



Cope, Zak. *Global Wage Scaling and Left Ideology: A Critique of Charlie Post on the 'Labor Aristocracy.'* Research in Political Economy, Volume 28. (89-129). 2013

Cope's most significant contribution in *Global Wage Scaling and Left Ideology* is in the realm of Marxist analysis of political economy, in particular by fleshing out and adding academic weight to Third Worldist understanding of imperialist economics. Though Cope is specifically addressing Post, his critique touches at the heart of what it means to have a revolutionary internationalist interpretation of modern capitalist-imperialism, including the necessity of analyzing political economy as a process which is global in scale:

Whilst most left theorists have for a long time fallen into the habit of gauging exploitation on a national(ist) basis, commonly examining wages in relation to profits in the rich countries (and thereby 'proving' that the most exploited workers in the world are those of the developed nations), in the context of global imperialism, value creation and distribution must be examined as an international process. (100)

To expand upon this idea, Cope quotes John Smith's 2010 *The GDP Illusion: Value-Added versus Value Captured*, "GDP,

which claims to be a measure of the wealth produced in a nation, is in reality, a measure of the wealth captured by a nation." (100) *Global Wage Scaling and Left Ideology* also includes an interesting quote from Smith, drawn from correspondence between the two authors: "...workers are paid not for what they produce, but for what they consume." (119)

With regards to the purchasing power of First World workers, Cope challenges Post's mainstream assertion that the real wages of Amerikans have been in steady decline:

Post (p. 24) observes that '[i]n the United States today, real wages for both union and non-union workers have fallen, and are about 11% below their 1973 level, despite strong growth beginning in the mid 1980s'. By measuring wages against GDP figures and reported profits, Post intends to convince his readership that the living standards of the US working class have been declining and that a renewed offensive against capital would entitle them to a greater share of the wealth they ostensibly create.

However, there are at least two problems with the idea that US wages have fallen. Firstly, whilst wages in the United States have indeed fallen since 1973 as a proportionate share of GDP, in real terms the poor in that country were better off in 1999 than they were in 1975. For example, Cox and Alm (1999) show that whereas in 1971 31.8% of all US households had air-conditioners, in 1994 49.6% of households below the poverty line had air-conditioners. These authors also demonstrate that the United States poor in 1999 had more refrigerators, dishwashers, clothes dryers, microwaves, televisions, college educations and personal computers than they did in 1971. Wages decidedly did not shrink, then, relative to the purchasing power necessary to consume these items. US economists Meyer and Sullivan (2011) have constructed a measure of consumption which challenges mainstream assessments of declining US living standards. They note that most income-based analyses of economic well-being in the United States do not reflect the full range of available household consumption resources such as, for example, food stamps, or lessened marginal tax rates....

Nor, indeed, did US incomes decline relative to the costs of those items necessary to the reproduction of the worker as such (the ‘value of labour power’, in Marxist terms). Thus, between 1970 and 1997, the real price of a food basket containing one pound of ground beef, one dozen eggs, three pounds of tomatoes, one dozen oranges, one pound of coffee, one pound of beans, half a gallon of milk, five pounds of sugar, one pound of bacon, one pound of lettuce, one pound of onions and one pound of bread fell so that it took 26% less of the workers’ time to buy it (*ibid*, pp. 40–41). (100-101)

Before constructing a broader picture of the world-economy to challenge Post’s own narrow nationalist view, Cope illustrates the basic yet fundamental Marxist economic analyses upon which Third Worldism partially rests:

According to Marx, during the time they are employed, production workers spend part of their day reproducing the value of the goods necessary to their own reproduction, that is, the cost of their own labour power (or variable capital). Marx calls this necessary labour. For the rest of the working day, these workers produce value exceeding that of their labour power, what Marx called surplus value (the com-

bined value of gross domestic investment, the non-productive or service sector and profits). The rate of surplus value (or of exploitation) is the ratio of surplus labour to necessary labour or of surplus value to the value of variable capital. Fundamentally, however, capitalists are not interested in creating surplus value, but in generating profit. Profit, as the unpaid labour time of the worker appropriated by the capitalist as measured against total capital invested, must be properly distinguished from surplus value. In bourgeois accounting terms, profit is simply the excess of sales revenue over the cost of producing the goods sold.

Thus, the price of production of a commodity does not directly correspond to its value within a single industry or group of industries (Marx, 1977b, pp. 758–759). Rather, as capital is withdrawn from industries with low rates of profit and invested in those with higher rates, output and supply in the former declines and its prices rise above the actual sums of value and surplus value the industry produces, and conversely. As a result, competing capitals using different magnitudes of value-creating labour ultimately sell commodities at average prices. As a result, surplus value is distributed more or less uniformly across the branches of production. An average rate of profit is formed by competing capitals’ continuous search for higher rates of profit and the flight of capital to and from those industrial sectors producing commodities in high or low demand. Overall, where one commodity sells for less than its value, there is a corresponding sale of another commodity for more than its value. (105)

The transfer of value from the Third to First World helps explain the widespread incorporation of unproductive and parasitical labor into local imperialist economies and provides the basis for the ability of First World firms to pay wages far above full labor value while still securing profit at normal rates. From the vulgar First Worldist Marxist position, this merely seems impossible.

Like many First Worldist critiques of Third Worldist anti-imperialism, Post cites high rates of investment between trilateral and OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries relative to the Global South to somehow ‘disprove’ imperialism. This position ignores the functionally intertwined nature of imperialism. Economically speaking,

there is little difference between Western Europe, the US and Canada, and Japan, as they are so highly invested and involved in each other’s local and international economies. However, as Cope rightly notes, “Post’s citation of the low level of global fixed capital formation that takes place in the global South, moreover, suggests a misunderstanding of the purpose of imperialism, namely, to siphon and extort surplus value from foreign territories.” (109)

Likewise, Post’s claims about foreign direct investment ignore the quality of such investments, as Cope aptly notes:

“FDI flows are purely quantitative and say nothing about the type of economic activity they are connected to. As such, mergers and acquisitions, merely representing a change in ownership, should be distinguished from ‘greenfield’ FDI in new plant and machinery. Whilst intra-OECD FDI is dominated by mergers and acquisitions activity, between 2000 and 2006, 51% of all Greenfield FDI was North–South.” (110)

Of course, this is significant because,

Post’s acceptance of capitalist accounting figures at face value, that is, without critiquing their real world significance in terms of average socially necessary labour and surplus labour (Cope, 2012), can only lead him to the absurd positions that (a) the world’s largest capitals have practically no interest in the Third World and (b) that the most exploited workers in the world (i.e. those whose higher productivity supposedly generates the biggest profits) are also the world’s richest. Thus, in an article for the Trotskyist Fourth International, Post writes that ‘global wage differentials are the result of the greater capital intensity (organic composition of capital) and higher productivity of labour (rate of surplus value) in the advanced capitalist social formations, not some sharing of “super profits” between capital and labour in the industrialized countries. Put simply, the better paid workers of the “north” are more exploited than the poorly paid workers of the “south”’. Post shows complete disregard for the massive infusions of capital which result from global surplus value transfer and the all-too obvious facts of Northern working consumption goods being the product of super-exploited Third World labour. For Post, the North’s purportedly greater ‘capital intensity’ and its workers’ higher ‘productivity’ may as well have dropped from the sky. (111-112)

This last sentence is important. If one were to believe the snake oil of First Worldism, one would have to believe that different organic compositions of capital between the First and Third World are simply incidental and have no relation to the history of imperialist exploitation. In reality, advanced productive forces are a form of capital derived from exploitation. That is to say, as is often the case, highly developed productive forces are accumulated and concentrated in the First World as a result of the super-exploitation of the Third World. Moreover, it takes a certain amount of chauvinism to ignore the social role of various forms of physical capital. As Post would have us believe, a cobalt mine in central Africa, an export manufacturer in Guangzhou, an electronics retailer in Cleveland, and a recycling depot like Guiyu are all one and the same.

It is fairly easy to dismiss Post's absurd denial of the effects of global wage scaling as part and parcel of the chauvinist legacy of Trotskyism. However, Post's essay encapsulates arguments also put forward by a wide variety of nominal leftists, including so-called Maoists. During its 23 year existence, the Maoist International Movement coined the term crypto-Trotskyism to reflect a prototypical slavish and chauvinist regard for the labor aristocracy and First World mass petty-bourgeoisie. Today, those who reject the sense of entitlement among globally-privileged workers refer to this revisionism as First Worldism. Today's Maoist (Third Worldist) movements reject and oppose not just opportunism and reformism on the part of Trotskyist groups like the ISO, but also the First Worldism promulgated under the banners of 'Marxism-Leninism' and 'Maoism.'

Cope accurately describes how First Worldism, despite its claims to the contrary, does not advance revolutionary movements in First World countries but does serve to obfuscate the materially-derived limitations to and potentials for their development:

The failure on the part of the left to rigorously examine the structuration of the international class structure by imperialism, as evidenced by the global contradiction between production and consumption highlighted above, has in no small measure added to the serious difficulties facing the socialist movement, both historically and today. Socialist movements in the metropolitan countries have tacitly accepted the global division between imperialist and exploited nations by obfuscating and divaricating from the issue of international surplus value transfer. Working class internationalism and the struggle against racism and colonialism within the imperialist countries are both sacrificed at the altar of narrow appeals to material self-interest on the part of the wealthiest sections of the ineluctably global workforce. Historically, such economism has its corollary in a deeply conservative reformism and chauvinist acceptance of the status quo ante, such that imperialist governments have been and are permitted to carry out virtually any act of aggression and penal repression against foreign countries and minority communities without fear of widespread national opposition. Metropolitan labour's dependence upon imperialism for its existence as such – that is as labour whose affluence is predicated upon the maintenance of the core-periphery divide – clearly precludes the possibility that its conservatism is based purely on intellectual myopia.

One could go further in this regard. Certainly, it is the structure of classes which inhibits the natural development of revolutionary working-class movements in the First World. On the other hand, First Worldism, i.e., 'left-wing' obfuscations and apologetisms for structural divisions of the working class, does actively set back the proletarian movement worldwide. One must only ask the question of why Amerikan workers, whom Post believes are among the world's most exploited, are so much better off than workers in Cuba, who are ostensibly liberated under a socialistic society. By falsely claiming that First

World workers are among the world's most exploited (and not simply the world's most historically privileged), Post's First Worldism creates an image where 'First World-style' capitalism is better than socialism, or at least offers a far higher material standard of living. By seeking to understand political economy internationally, including an honest appraisal of global class structures, Communists develop more realistic and creative strategies for global socialist struggle along with more egalitarian visions of Communism itself.

Taken as a whole, Cope's critical response to Post is another nail in the coffin of First Worldism. Not only does Cope tackle many of Post's 'arguments,' he effectively underlines the importance of Third Worldist critique of global political economy. Within the anti-imperialist movement, the struggle against First Worldism goes hand in hand with the struggle against reformism, narrow nationalism, social chauvinism, and dogmatism. *Global Wage Scaling and Left Ideology* further fleshes out the Third Worldist repudiation of First Worldism, offering a potent theoretical attack against the one of today's most prevalent forms of revisionism. Alongside *Divided World, Divided Class*, this latest entry by Zak Cope is part of a growing chorus for rectification of radical and revolutionary movements.

-Nikolai Brown

1. "Despite its diverse forms, all of the variants of the labour-aristocracy thesis agree on two key-points. First, working-class conservatism is the result of material differences – relative privileges – enjoyed by some workers. Workers who embrace racism, nativism, sexism, homophobia and pro-imperialist patriotism tend to be those who earn higher wages, experience more secure employment, and have access to health-care, pensions and other forms of the social wage. Second, the source of this relative privilege ('the bribe') is a sharing of higher-than-average profits between capitalists and a privileged labour-aristocracy." (Post 6)



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The Materialist Analysis of Capital



LLS 2010

“Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him.” – Karl Marx, “Das Kapital, Volume I”

In the vulgar economics department, the word capital is lightly thrown around as a synonymous of the Maoist concept of the instruments of labor; that is, every factor utilized in a productive process that isn't labor. According to this tale, capital and labor, by being so simplistically defined, have a transhistorical character; they have always existed and they will always exist, the only factor that can change is the way in which they relate in production. From here originates the definition of capitalism as the economy characterized by a free market and private ownership, and socialism as the economy characterized by state ownership. Perhaps, in the realm of academic economics, this is the most evident manifestation of commodity fetishism.

Probing into the theory of commodity fetishism is hence in order. The concept encapsulates the ways in which the social relationships between people in a society built on a social division of labor, national and international, take the form of relationships between things, making the exchangeability of commodities in a market appear as a natural phenomenon, and not an historically specific one.

In the capitalist mode of production, the allocation of human labor in the various sectors of the economy isn't organized by means of direct relationships between people, but rather by the process of circulation of commodities, which

indirectly disciplines production by forcing enterprises to change prices, quality, and quantity of goods produced. The Angolan oil rig workers, the Burkinabé cotton pickers, the Chinese textile workers, the American retail stores; all these realities are coordinated by the international law of value. When a worker buys a t-shirt, they can't appraise the entire chain of concrete labors required to bring that commodity to their favorite store. We don't see the work that creates commodities; we just see that commodity standing in relation of value to others. That t-shirt was worth the same as another one, or worth two baseball caps, or maybe a pair of sneakers. The exchange-value of the object we look at appears to be a property of the object itself, and not a result of particular social relationships between workers all over the world mediated by monetary exchanges. However, since 1971, the dollar is nothing more than pieces of paper. What makes these pieces of paper so valuable, if not gold?

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production, M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering – so

M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us – in the bosom of the “impersonal reason of humanity.” M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist. The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with the material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories, in conformity with their social relations. Thus the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products. – Karl Marx, “The Poverty of Philosophy”

Our point of departure must be the relationships existing between people as they produce for each other. Extending this analysis to the means of production means analyzing the social relations that seize upon objects utilized in our workplaces. Any instrument of labor, for example a book printer, can enter into various types of social relations. When we use a printer to print a book, the printer is part of the process creating the book. This is where it's important to remember the specific condition of capitalist production, i.e. a social division of labor: any single labor process in capitalist society can only be understood as part of a greater web of relations between independent producers. If we gifted the book we printed to a friend of ours, it would involve no monetary transaction and would only be for direct

consumption. Using the same printer, we could be printing books in a capitalist printing factory; those books would in this context be sold in the market and become part of the capitalist division of labor, producing a profit for the factory owner. In this peculiar case, the most important characteristic of the book is not its use-value for our friend, but the customer's pocket, the profit that can be realized by selling the book as a commodity. Here the useful properties of the book and the printer are reduced to their ability to realize profits for a capitalist. In two exactly identical labor processes we can observe two entirely different social effects resulting from the set of relationships in which they are inserted. For the capitalist, the purpose of the printer, and indeed, of the factory itself, the paper and ink needed as inputs, the money used to buy these inputs, and the labor of his workers, are all means to the end of profit and become incarnations of capital. To make the conclusion explicit, capital as a category of political economy can't be understood as an object, but has to be understood as a particular social relationship between people that seizes upon an object; a printer is capital only when inserted in a labor process geared towards the production of surplus value in a context of social division of labor mediated by commodity exchange.

Etymologically, the vulgar economic description of capitalism as a society of voluntary exchange falls apart; according to the Collins English Dictionary – Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition, “-ism” is a suffix forming nouns indicating a doctrine, system, or body of principles and practices. Capitalism can hence only be understood as the system of capital. If capitalism is a system of capital, and capital is an element of this system, we can probe into the contradiction between the totality and the element: capital is a social relation; capitalism is a mode of production in which capital becomes the dominant social relation.

Capital is concerned with profit, it is value in motion; we can capture its movement with the circuit of industrial capital, the most important and foundational circuit for

the reproduction of capitalist society: M-C...P...C'-M'.

In this model, money (M) is advanced, input commodities (which include labor power, machinery, and raw materials) are purchased (C), direct (living) and indirect (dead) labor time is applied in production (P), creating commodities with higher value (C') which are then sold in order to realize an amount of money higher than the sum invested (M'). This circuit, where money becomes a means of making more money (that is, where money becomes capital), is entirely different from what is termed simple commodity exchange, captured by the circuit C-M-C, where a commodity is exchanged for money which is then used to acquire another commodity of an equivalent value.

The commodity is exchanged for money; money is exchanged for the commodity. In this way, commodity is exchanged for commodity, except that this exchange is a mediated one. The purchaser becomes a seller again and the seller becomes purchaser again. In this way, each is posited in the double and the antithetical aspect, and hence in the living unity of both aspects. – Karl Marx, “Grundrisse”

Following from the M-C...P...C'-M' circuit, we have two other circuits:

M-M', the circuit of bank-capital; here a loan is advanced and interest is paid on the loan;

M-C-C-M', the circuit of arbitrage; here money is advanced to buy a commodity and that same commodity is resold for a higher amount of money in a market where it has a higher price.

Only the M-C...P...C'-M' circuit produces surplus value, i.e. unpaid labor performed by the working class which sells its labor power to the capitalist, who appropriates its products. While the laborer sells his labor power (ability to do work) to the capitalist, he also cedes his effective labor, which

can't be disembodied from him. M-M' and M-C-C-M', on the other hand, appropriate value in exchange. This is easily proven by the fact that any society that limited itself to buying cheap and selling dear and loaning wouldn't survive for more than a week.

A society whose regulator of production is profit, i.e. unpaid labor, is bound to be a society of antagonism; there is no place on earth where this can't be observed. There are antagonisms between workers and capitalists, among workers looking for jobs, among capitalists looking for sales, between oppressed nations and oppressor nations, between the patriarchal structure of society and women, between oppressed genders and heteronormativity, between imperialist and imperialized countries for markets and sovereignty, among transnational ruling classes for hegemony. This climate of antagonism is precisely what so-called general equilibrium, a fantasy of vulgar economics, tries to conceal.

If the capitalists' interest is to exploit labor as much as possible, what is the working class's direct interest? Their interest is to overthrow the bourgeois state and affirm themselves as a class by means of a dictatorship of the proletariat: a transitory period between capitalism and communism, a classless, stateless society of freely associated producers. The proletariat has to declare

the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionizing of all the ideas that result from these social relations. –Karl Marx, “Class Struggles in France”

-Klaas Velija



A Loose Overview and Practical Interpretation of John Foran's Thesis on the Causal Factors Behind Revolutions

In his book, *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions* (2005, Cambridge University Press), sociologist John Foran calculates a series of causal factors behind the development and success of revolutions.

According to Foran, the necessary ingredients for nearly all revolutions in the 20th century have been:

- Dependent development.
- Exclusionary or colonial rule, or democratic polities.
- Political cultures of opposition.
- An economic downturn.
- A world-system opening.
- A revolutionary outbreak which encompasses a multi-class, -national, -gender coalition.

Additionally, as part of the outcome of revolutionary movements, successful revolutions are those which develop under the guidance and protection of a centralized and organized force in the form of a post-revolutionary state. Also, despite the initial success of a revolution, features of dependent development never go away quickly and internal forms of oppression may reappear.

What this means:

- Dependent development is the economic structuring of a given national economy for the purpose of exporting value. Essentially, one of Foran's major theses is that revolutions, with the exception of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, occur in Third World countries.
- Exclusionary or colonial rule describe forms of local governance and power that are socially exclusive, nepotistic, or aristocratic. Under colonialism, oppressed nations are politically and economically disempowered by oppressing nations. In other cases, political power may be consolidated by local economic elites or structured nepotistically around a single family. However, revolutions may also occur



in countries in which the nominal 'left' has an opportunity at electoral representation.

- Political cultures of opposition include leading ideologies, organizations and networks, cultural idioms, subjective historical experiences, and emotions all combined into opposition to a given ruling regime or political system.
- An economic downturn typically causes a drop in the quality of life for the masses of people in Third World countries. Due to the nature of capitalism, economic growth and downturns are cyclical. The Third World proletariat only receives marginal improvements to their quality of life during periods of boom and major decreases during periods of bust. This, in turn, can create widespread disaffection from the reigning political establishment, legitimize political cultures of opposition, and help create the diverse character of revolutionary coalitions.
- A world-system opening is a moment in which imperialist powers are too distracted, divided, or slow to effectively intervene against a revolutionary movement.
- Revolutions inherently require participation from many sectors of a given society, including intellectuals, military personnel, peasants, students, national minorities, women, workers, and serving classes. While representation of different groups in revolutionary movements may vary depending on social-historical context, some degree of heterogeneity is always a factor in revolutions.
- Likewise, in order for revolutions to succeed over a long period in a sea of global hostility and encirclement by capitalist powers, a certain degree of centralism is necessary. In the crudest sense, this is why anarchist revolutions have always failed or reneged on their ideals, and why the post-revolution governments of China, North Korea, and Cuba still exist in some continuous form today. As well, many of the material, economic, political, cultural, and psychological features of dependent development are slow to disappear following revolutions, and previous forms of oppression may reappear.

Analyzing Today's Struggles

While Foran's thesis is insightful in answering the question, 'why do revolutions

happen?; it is useful only insofar as its relates to the concrete struggles of today's world.

In this respect, Foran's thesis can be used as an analytical framework with which to approach modern conflicts:

- Palestine

Currently, the Palestinian people live under a settler-colonial occupation by Israel. Their economy is not simply underdeveloped, it is maldeveloped, and many Palestinians have fled their homeland for both political and economics reasons. Historically, Palestinians have resisted the theft of their land. These factors alone help explain the wide range of resistance today.

However, for the time being, the global political powers are firmly behind Israel, thus preventing any large world-systemic opening for success of the Palestinian liberation struggle. And, despite its strangulation by Israel, the informal Palestinian economy has thrived while the economic status of diaspora communities is too varied to be influenced by a single country's economic downturn. Likewise, the world-system has successfully installed the comprador Palestinian Authority, blunting political cultures of opposition in the process. And, the reliance on resident Palestinians on informal merchant economies (along with outside aid from imperialist NGOs on one hand and foreign Islamists on the other) helps provide a material basis for the strength of groups such as Hamas (as opposed to those organizing opposition on a specifically socialist basis). Nonetheless, some form of opposition to Israel by Palestinians (both in Occupied Palestine and internationally in diaspora communities) is widespread.

Of course, one or several of these factors could change, thus creating the full set of causal factors necessary for a Palestinian revolution.

The most obvious of these factors would be a world-system opening. If Israel were to lose its sponsorship by imperialist governments, it would be left vulnerable on the world stage and economically harmed. A wider range of opposition may result along with a situation in which revolutionary Palestinian forces could ascend without counter-revolutionary foreign intervention.

The development of a Palestinian revolutionary coalition which spans beyond the narrow ideological constituencies of groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad is

also necessary for the future success of any Palestinian revolutionary movement.

Any successful Palestinian revolution would be based on a social coalition containing contradictions which would necessarily continue to play out after the revolution. This settling of social contradictions (i.e., the process of establishing the dominance of one sector of the revolutionary movement over others) is also tied to the way in which any post-revolution Palestinian state would confront lingering features of dependent development and relate to other actors in the world-system. Would a post-revolution Palestine continue to revolutionize its internal relations while becoming an oppositional force against the capitalist-imperialist world-system? Or, would it reinstate oppressive institutions as part of its compliant re-entry into the world-system, itself becoming another reactionary comprador-led Middle East country? These are the questions a Palestinian revolution would create.

- Syria

Syria, up until the recent conflict, was the classic example of a bourgeois-nationalist state turned comprador. (1) While Syria was able to gain independence from France in the 20th century, the years after were notable for its lack of a coherent socialist economic and social program.

By 2010, Syria, though nominally nationalist and socialist, had cultivated ties with Russian capital as a 'lesser-of-two-evils' foreign policy. This was the outward expression of an exclusionary internal political life and capitalist productive relations which ultimately served foreign monopolies.

While the Arab Spring led to an outpouring of political opposition to the Assad-led Syrian regime, a world-systemic opening was turning into its inverse: US-led imperialism began sponsoring various militant forces to fight Assad. This world-systemic shift would have normally caused the collapse of the Syrian government. However, in this case, Russia has maintained support for the Syrian government.

One result in the world systemic shift regarding Syria is the changed character of the Syrian opposition. With the support of the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, the Syrian opposition has rapidly turned into a reactionary force committed to the overthrow of Assad for US interests. This has shattered the popular character of opposition and the possibility of developing a

broad revolutionary coalition against Assad.

One causal factor which could quickly change in Syria is the political culture of opposition. Within Syria, the possibility exists to create independent revolutionary opposition which, through entering into tactical united fronts today, can become a steeled fighting force for future revolutionary struggles. As part of the current conflict, Kurds in the northern Syria have secured de facto autonomy via independent armed struggle. By acting independently while opposing the FSA but also Assad, the Kurds have managed create a popular movement of sovereignty in their own northern border region. Whether and how this will be sustained remains to be seen. In my own estimation, the Kurds have more to gain from a united front and negotiated temporary alliance with the Russian-backed Syrian government than from the US/Israeli/Saudi/Turkey-backed FSA 'rebels.'

- India

Out of view from the western mainstream, India is home to one of today's largest Marxist guerrilla movements. The Naxalites, now led in main by the Communist Party of India (Maoist), have been waging a decades long 'people's war' against the Indian state.

Why is this?

India, historically, has been a colonized country. After independence it retained features of dependent development. As the same time, as a large and diverse country, it developed features of internal colonization—particularly against indigenous Adivasis who provide the CPI-Maoist with mass support. Indian society has been and is socially-exclusionary, stratified by caste, gender, and nationality. It is also home to a small yet growing petty bourgeois 'middle class' which is divorced from the masses at large. While exporting value to its own and foreign capitals, the basic masses receive little from 'development' and are vulnerable to economic downturns.

India also has a long history of oppositional cultures, both against British colonialism and the following comprador rule. Maoism in India developed out the struggle against revisionist Marxists who had gained political power in regional governments.

Two things which are hindering revolution in India are the lack of a world-systemic opening and the lack of a heterogeneous

revolutionary coalition. The US currently supplies the reactionary Indian state with hi-tech weaponry, including drones, to use in its offensives against the CPI-Maoist. The CPI-Maoist has yet to organize several sectors of Indian society on a sufficient basis for the development of a country-wide revolution.

Another factor worth considering is the semi-peripheral nature of India (i.e., the existence of Indian monopoly capital and labor aristocracy on a smaller scale as well as the phenomenon of internal colonization), and how this may affect revolutionary strategies over the long-term.

Applications

Beyond using Foran's thesis to gain some insight into the development of world events and revolutions, can we approach this same thesis to guide our own praxes? How may Foran's analysis of causal factors behind revolutions be applied in our own conscious interventions into world events?

Under Foran's rubric, the actions of individuals and groups are directly part of political cultures of opposition. Beginning with the assumption that revolution in the First World is foremost hindered by the effects of imperialist parasitism, what options remain for advanced elements of oppositional political cultures in the First World? In short, how can revolutionaries in the First World aid in the development of revolutionary struggles generally?

In essence, the question comes down to affecting variable causal factors (i.e., respective political cultures of oppositions, world-systemic openings, and the development of socially complex revolutionary coalitions) in the Third World 'storm centers of revolution'?

This can be done by building a wider First World oppositional movement dedicated to four programmatic principles:

- Opposition to the twin revisionist ideologies of Productivism and First Worldism

- Adherence to the principle of revolutionary defeatism; and building internationalist oppositional political cultures against the global rule of one's 'own' capitalist-imperialists
- Supporting in theory and practice the development of national liberation struggles within imperialist countries toward the end of wholesale dissolution of imperialist political power
- Stressing an internationalist, egalitarian, and forward-looking vision of revolution based on the long-term shared interest of humanity, i.e., premised on developing socialism and communism.

Productivism and First Worldism

Productivism and First Worldism are twin ideologies which justify massive disparities with redundant and implicitly reformist interpretations.

According to First Worldism and Productivism, super-wages received by First World workers are but a fraction of the value these workers create via highly developed means of production. That is to say, First Worldism and Productivism believe a significant proportion of First World workers are exploited. Implied is that Third World countries can 'catch up' with First World countries through a concerted effort at developing their own productive forces.

While First Worldism and Productivism may seem new, they are not. Rather, they have always been part and parcel of the reformist, 'structuralist' trend of Marxism. Offering purely material justifications and technical explanations for global wage scaling, the First Worldist and Productivist viewpoint implies similarly technical and material solutions. In the end and despite their rhetoric to the contrary, First Worldism and Productivism implicitly negates the variable and subjective factors of revolution.

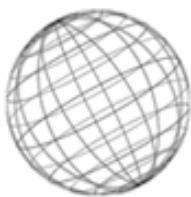
The wealth of the First World is not the result of advanced technology. This statement itself is redundant: in reality, wealth

takes the form of advanced technology. The First World is wealthy because it imports surplus value from the Third World. Most Third World countries do not have massive colonies upon which to rest the weight of super-exploitation. When Third World countries do pursue development policies based on the Productivist and First Worldist outlooks, the end result is always capitalistic dispossession of the working masses and internal colonization. It is no coincidence that the First Worldist and Productivist trends were dominant during the defeat of socialism in China in the 70's.

First Worldism and Productivism also have disastrous ecological implications. Any future socialism which is exclusively focused on 'catching up with' (and not defeating) imperialist countries will merely accelerate climate and habitat disruption spawned under capitalism.

First Worldism and Productivism are not problems of significance only in the First World. They are revisionist trends of international significance. First Worldism and Productivism look toward imperialist countries as examples of 'advanced capitalism.' They sow confusion in the proletarian movement by claiming the large 'middle class' in imperialist countries is exploited. This is despite the fact that supposedly 'exploited' First World workers have access to a greater magnitude of labor-value than supposedly 'empowered' workers in nominally socialist countries like Cuba. First Worldism and Productivism, by claiming rich First World workers are exploited and poor Cuban workers are liberated, implicitly promotes capitalism and holds back political cultures of opposition.

Maoism (Third Worldism), on one hand, and First Worldism and Productivism, on the other, are two polar orientations in the International Communist Movement. Our efforts to build the Maoist (Third Worldist) movement, whether in the First or Third Worlds, is necessarily connected to the struggle to reorient global political cultures of opposition toward revolutionary inter-



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On Global People's War and Global New Democratic Revolution



(Continued: Causal Factors)

nationalism and away from reformist social-democracy.

Revolutionary Defeatism

Within the First World, it is absolutely necessary to build oppositional cultures which work for the 'revolutionary defeat' of one's 'own' imperialists. This applies in all realms of economics, politics, and war. Within the First World, we should strive to build an oppositional political culture which opposes the First World. Our aim is to blunt the international effectiveness of reactionaries and to build the progenitor forces of a wider revolutionary coalition within the First World. In our efforts to oppose 'our' imperialists, we should support forces of a global united front against imperialism.

Support National Liberation

As part of the struggle against First World imperialism, revolutionaries in the First World must support struggles for national liberation of oppressed nations. Oppressed nations in the First World and the exploited masses of the Third World are natural allies. The total liquidation of imperialist political power will best be achieved through the political ascendancy of revolu-

Under capitalist-imperialism, in which the exploitation of the proletariat by monopoly capital is mediated by the oppression of nations, the path to socialism and communism is through global people's war and global new democratic revolution. The struggle to sever the structural ties of capitalist-imperialism and build the subjective forces of proletarian revolution are one and the same. The movement for international socialism and communism can only successfully emerge through the movement against the international rule of a few 'great' imperialist powers.

However, before proceeding further into a discussion on revolution (much less a 'global new democratic' revolution), it is worth asking a few questions.

First and foremost, what is a revolution?

Mao Zedong described revolution as "an act of violence by which one class overthrows another." For Marxists, revolutions

tional national liberation forces in tangent with a global revolutionary uprising against the First World.



Communist Politics

Along with opposing First Worldism and Productivism, adhering to revolutionary defeatism, and supporting national liberation, we must put forward specifically communist politics: i.e., understandings about the necessary means of revolution along with clarity over our goals. Communists strive for the total eradication of class divisions and oppression via conscious struggle.

End Note

Foran's elaboration on the causal factors of revolution provides current revolutionaries with much food for thought. However, at

serves to overthrow the rule of representatives of capital, establishing socialism: a period in which, according to Nikolai Bukharin:

"Even after it has been 'thrown on its back on the ground,' the bourgeoisie still uses what resources remain to it, to go on fighting against the workers; and that, ultimately, it relies on international reaction in such a way that the final victory of the workers will be possible only when the proletariat has freed the whole world of the capitalist rabble and completely suffocated the bourgeoisie."

Making an explicit connection to the struggle of colonized, exploited peoples against imperialism, Lenin also noted that socialist revolution is "not one single act, not one single battle on a single front; but a whole epoch of intensified class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., battles around all the problems of economics and

the end of the day, it is up to revolutionaries to participate in a praxis which aids and directly engages in the development of revolution.

-Nikolai Brown is a co-editor of Anti-Imperialism.com and author of Third Worldism: Marxist Critique of Imperialist Political Economy.

(1) "Soon after assuming power in 2000, Bashar al-Assad introduced wide-ranging economic reforms that lay an irreversible foundation for a market-driven economic order. He enacted an investment-promoting decree; privatized state farms; introduced a private banking system; liberalized capital and trade accounts; heavily reduced customs duties; and promoted private sector-led investment at the expense of state-led investment."

Lina Matar, *The Socioeconomic Roots of the Syrian Uprising*.

<http://www.mei.nus.edu.sg/publications/mei-insights/the-socioeconomic-roots-of-the-syrian-uprising>



politics, which can culminate only in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie.” Thus, for Marxists, socialist revolutions in particular countries are significant only insofar as they aid in the development of a global socialist epoch of victorious struggle against capitalism.

Beyond abstractions, revolutions typically share causal features: they take place in countries racked by imperialist exploitation and maldevelopment; usually follow or accompany structural-economic downturns; occur in periods of conflict among forces of international reaction during which the effective and immediate mobilization of counter-revolutionary maneuvers is inhibited; and involve heterogeneous coalitions, leading organizations and institutions, and the development of an oppositional political culture. (Foran) While these causal features have historically pertained to individual countries, it is necessary to perceive of their existence globally.

We can synthesize this to say: revolutions are the violent overthrow of one class by another, both in the case of single countries and as part of a larger global process; proceeding from neo-colonial and colonial areas; usually as part of the context of structural-economic downturns; during which international sections of reactionary classes are too divided among themselves to intervene on an immediate or effective basis; and involve the growing oppositional political cultures of diverse coalitions and leading, naturally ascendant, revolutionary forces.

The next question to arise is, what is the class character of such a revolution? Which class or classes overthrow which others?

Drawing partially from authors such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin, one could argue we are heading for (and are now beginning to witness) a period of intense polarization and conflict along with the development of increased inter- and intra-imperialist rivalries. This period, which is unfolding now due in part to the inherent contradictions of capitalism and in part to world-historic circumstance, could be described as ‘a coming global civil war.’ It marks a world-historic point of bifurcation. Depending on subjective factors, i.e., the respective mobilization of different class forces, history may lean toward socialism. Or, another much worse future could evolve from the conflict, perhaps Marx’s notion of the ‘common ruin of all contending classes’; or, more likely, a

sort of neo-tributary system made possible through the advancement of the productive forces along with the ‘freezing’ of social hierarchies and classes via the increasing devotion of surplus social product toward ruling-class political violence and the maintenance of an ideologically conditioned technocratic elite and labor aristocracy. Needless to say, we are entering a period of extreme opportunities and dangers, during which the best bet for the proletariat is to play full-court with the best possible strategies available.

Despite these brief descriptions of possible significance of future conflicts, it is more important to firmly understand the past and present. The current state of the world involves a series of relationships which provides avenues for the transfer of value originating in the (super-) exploitation of a global formal and semi-formal work-force. As part of the structure of imperialism necessarily maintained through global reactionary violence, surplus value is typically produced in the Third World or otherwise by a proletarianized labor force, transferred via various mechanisms (including the pricing of commodities such as labor power above their value), and realized in the First World by monopolistic and parasitic tertiary sectors capital.

Thus, instead of the dualistic, faux-Marxist conception of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and working classes, there are instead a wide array of classes conforming to various economic roles. Included among them are:

- Direct representatives and holders of finance capital
- The comprador bourgeoisie of the Third World
- Bourgeois-nationalist forces of the Third World
- A section of embourgeoisified, largely non-productive and hence wholly parasitic workers: i.e. the working petty-bourgeoisie or ‘labor aristocracy’; those who derive material privilege from the accumulation of capital (from whom we might subtract a progressive section of petty-bourgeoisie as a strategic social variable)
- Those nationally oppressed within the First World, including migrants, or those otherwise forced into especially oppressive productive relations
- Those layers of people who form the modern proletariat, i.e., those who re-

ceive few of the benefits of modern society; their labor used to further perpetuate their own economic disenfranchisement and while forming the basis of the capitalist-imperialist economy.

Generally speaking, we can summarize the revolutionary struggle as one waged by the modern proletariat and its allies (the progressive national bourgeoisie, the progressive petty-bourgeoisie, those living under national oppression within the First World) against imperialists and their hangers-on (compradors, the parasitic working petty-bourgeoisie). Though other contradictions may certainly come into play (and thus be acted upon by these opposing sides of class struggle), this forms the basic outline of class forces for the purpose of conceiving of revolutionary strategy.

Following from such an understanding global class dynamics, we can firmly state that revolution in the general sense includes the movement to:

- First, develop revolutionary coalitions which overthrow imperialism, thus resolving the structural and super-structural contradictions (which give rise to vast inequalities) between the productive, exploited Global South – the prison of the global proletariat – and the parasitic Global North – the house of finance capital.
- Second, eliminate inherent contradictions which arise from the existence the capitalist mode of production, substituting systems of socialism, i.e., the temporary political and economic rule of the proletariat.
- Lastly, destroy every vestige associated with capitalism, including alienation, along with the very existence of classes, nations, and the state.

It should be pointed out in all clarity: these tasks flow from one another and are made possible by the completion of the previous.

During the supremacy of the proletarian line during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the line of global people’s war and global new democratic revolution as a first stage of socialism and communism was partially articulated by Lin Biao in the essay, *Long Live the Victory of People’s War!* In the chapter on the international significance of Mao’s theory on people’s war, Lin first informs the reader about the historical significance of the October and Chinese revolutions, the latter carried out by a decades-long people’s war against the

Japanese imperialists and US-backed Kuomintang ‘nationalists’:

“The Chinese revolution is a continuation of the great October Revolution. The road of the October Revolution is the common road for all people’s revolutions. The Chinese revolution and the October Revolution have in common the following basic characteristics: (1) Both were led by the working class with a Marxist-Leninist party as its nucleus. (2) Both were based on the worker-peasant alliance. (3) In both cases state power was seized through violent revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat was established. (4) In both cases the socialist system was built after victory in the revolution. (5) Both were component parts of the proletarian world revolution.”

Going on, Lin outlines the global applicability of people’s war, and thus its world-historic significance:

“Many countries and peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America are now being subjected to aggression and enslavement on a serious scale by the imperialists headed by the United States and their lackeys. The basic political and economic conditions in many of these countries have many similarities to those that prevailed in old China. As in China, the peasant question is extremely important in these regions. The peasants constitute the main force of the national-democratic revolution against the imperialists and their lackeys. In committing aggression against these countries, the imperialists usually begin by seizing the big cities and the main lines of communication, but they are unable to bring the vast countryside completely under their control. The countryside, and the countryside alone, can provide the broad areas in which the revolutionaries can maneuver freely. The countryside, and the countryside alone, can provide the revolutionary bases from which the revolutionaries can go forward to final victory. Precisely for

this reason, Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s theory of establishing revolutionary base areas in the rural districts and encircling the cities from the countryside is attracting more and more attention among the people in these regions.

“Taking the entire globe, if North America and Western Europe can be called ‘the cities of the world,’ then Asia, Africa and Latin America constitute ‘the rural areas of the world.’ Since World War II, the proletarian revolutionary movement has for various reasons been temporarily held back in the North American and West European capitalist countries, while the people’s revolutionary movement in Asia, Africa and Latin America has been growing vigorously. In a sense, the contemporary world revolution also presents a picture of the encirclement of cities by the rural areas. In the final analysis, the whole cause of world revolution hinges on the revolutionary struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples who make up the overwhelming majority of the world’s population. The socialist countries should regard it as their internationalist duty to support the people’s revolutionary struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America.”

Reaffirming the Maoist line, Lin explains global people’s war has both a socialist character and operates to develop global new democratic revolution:

“Comrade Mao Tse-tung made a correct distinction between the two revolutionary stages, i.e., the national-democratic and the socialist revolutions; at the same time he correctly and closely linked the two. The national-democratic revolution is the necessary preparation for the socialist revolution, and the socialist revolution is the inevitable sequel to the national-democratic revolution. There is no Great Wall between the two revolutionary stages. But the socialist revolution is only possible after the completion of the national-democratic

revolution. The more thorough the national-democratic revolution, the better the conditions for the socialist revolution.

“The experience of the Chinese revolution shows that the tasks of the national-democratic revolution can be fulfilled only through long and tortuous struggles. In this stage of revolution, imperialism and its lackeys are the principal enemy. In the struggle against imperialism and its lackeys, it is necessary to rally all anti-imperialist patriotic forces, including the national bourgeoisie and all patriotic personages. All those patriotic personages from among the bourgeoisie and other [Third World] exploiting classes who join the anti-imperialist struggle play a progressive historical role; they are not tolerated by imperialism but welcomed by the proletariat.

“It is very harmful to confuse the two stages, that is, the national-democratic and the socialist revolutions. Comrade Mao Tse-tung criticized the wrong idea of ‘accomplishing both at one stroke,’ and pointed out that this utopian idea could only weaken the struggle against imperialism and its lackeys, the most urgent task at that time.”

Of course, this idea about the importance of the struggles of exploited countries is not new. In 1869, Karl Marx remarked:

“For a long time I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy...Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general.”

Some who falsely claim the mantle of Marxism also deride the above viewpoints as ‘stage-ist.’ Ironically, this ‘critique’ is correct: revolutionary Marxists are sepa-



rated from idealists and anarchists by the former's fundamental understanding that history develops in stages according the dialectical relationship between the base and superstructure of society. In the same vein, modern Marxists understand it is only global people's war and global new democratic revolution which can effectively lay the material and socio-historic foundations for socialism and communism.

In order to gain a better grasp on global people's war, it is necessary to make an analogy to the development of people's war in China. China was a large country with a 'backwards' (i.e. maldeveloped) economy. There was a vast division between the agrarian countryside and the cities, the de facto base for foreign- and domestic-reactionary power. Mao's forces were able to rally the forces of the countryside, notably the peasants which suffered from deep oppression, into building armed and civil dual power institutions, which were eventually able to dominate and militarily overcome the reactionary forces of the cities while gaining the support of a powerful new democratic revolutionary coalition which included members of the national bourgeoisie and progressive petty-bourgeoisie.

A certain parallel exists in regards to the global prospects for revolution. In order to overcome international reaction centered in the Global North, it is necessary to organize the global countryside, notably those most exploited and oppressed under imperialism, into armed oppositional movements and revolutionary states, in tangent with a global new democratic revolutionary coalition – a broad united front against imperialism – which includes progressive sections of the national bourgeoisie of exploited countries, progressive members of the mass petty-bourgeoisie of the First World, and captive oppressed people in the First World.

The global new democratic revolution is foremost anti-imperialist yet fundamentally proletarian. It is a "transitional stage between the termination of a colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal society and the establishment of a socialist society" (Mao) which is only possible "because of the leadership of the proletariat," i.e., the leadership of parties which represents the interest of the proletariat. (Chen)

Of course, a global people's war and global new democratic revolution is only the sum of its parts. It necessitates a number of aspects: successful people's wars and pro-

letarian revolutions in individual countries; the development and partial ascendancy of bourgeois nationalist ruling-power in individual countries in association with the leadership of the international proletariat; the weakening of imperialism through the loss of the labor power of the newly liberated global proletariat; and the development of oppositional coalitions of progressive sections of the Global North (oppressed nations, youth, intellectuals, etc) under the leadership of the international proletariat.

Finally, insofar as revolution represents the violent overthrow of one class by another, global new democratic revolution represents the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and oppressed nations over the former imperialists and their social and financial lackeys. As part of a transition to socialism, global new democratic revolution is a period of 'settling accounts' between the First and Third World, of redistributing productive capacity and ownership, and severing the ties which enable and necessitate massive value transfers from the latter to the former. In some cases, unproductive sectors of the economy will be wiped away. Formerly parasitical workers will be retrained and conditioned for productive labor. Economic space in both the First and Third World will be retrofitted. Trade patterns, though centralized to some degree, will cease to offer undervalued imports to the First World, resulting in the need to further reintegrate productive activities into First World economies. No longer able to import undervalued commodities as part of a relationship of unequal exchange, production, though centralized, would also become more localized, especially for basic items like food. Moreover, some of the basic means of production which serve privileged consumption will need to be re-distributed and relocated to the Third World to serve the masses. (i.e., one could imagine unnecessary and superfluous restaurant equipment being sent to and serving the larger interests of the Third World proletariat; or passenger vehicles being recycled into planned intercontinental public transportation.)

Within the First World, revolutionary coalitions (of the nationally oppressed, other progressive local forces, and the international proletariat) would come to political power. In conjunction with the international proletariat, oppressed nations in particular would gain political administration over the current sovereign territories of

settler-imperialist powers. The political institutions which currently serve white power would be dissolved and replaced by those which suit the strategic interests of the international proletariat. Global people's war and global new democratic revolution demands the national liberation and self-determination of captive oppressed nations, particular on lands drawn from what is currently the sovereign territory of settler-imperialist regimes.

The process of re-proletarianizing the First World naturally comes into question. The process of reforming the consciousness of a billion parasites will no doubt be a protracted, arduous process. Certainly the international proletariat needs revolutionary strata to administer over territories currently under the sovereign control of finance capital. Along with the further development of revolutionary consciousness among oppressed nations, there will exist the need for trained political cadre guided by the leadership of the international proletariat. These cadres will in great part, especially at the beginning, be drawn from the progressive forces sympathetic to and actively supportive of the global new democratic revolution. The training of the First World cadres should be conducted among the basic masses (i.e., the Third World masses) as part of the beginning of widespread 'to the countryside' re-education programs aimed at eradicating bourgeois culture under the full weight of proletarian power.

While global new democratic revolution will break down the rule of monopoly capital along with the privileged position of compradors and the working petty-bourgeoisie, it will facilitate an end to capitalist productive relations and create the material basis for production which serves to effectively and rationally meet the needs of humanity. Once the social fetters of unequal exchange, wage scaling, and the market mechanisms are eradicated, along with parasitic and outmoded sectors of the capitalist-imperialist economy (i.e., finance, advertising, media, policing, security, military, bureaucratic, sales, retail, etc), the productive energies of the masses can act in an uninterrupted fashion toward fully meeting the requirements for its material reproduction and cultural and psychological fulfillment. Without the dead weight of parasitic imperialism, including its hang-ups, the masses can push history forward in a positive manner: through socialism and toward communism. In this manner, global new democratic revolution

Bonded Labor in South Asia

One of the most horrific forms of capitalist exploitation today is to be found in South Asia: bonded labor. This contemporary form of slavery, despite being illegal, is practiced in all sectors of South Asian economies—mainly in India, Nepal and Pakistan—and exists both as a rural and urban phenomenon.

Bonded labor is “the status or condition arising from a pledge by a debtor of his personal services or those of a person under his control as security for a debt, if the value of those services as reasonably assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt or the length and nature of those services are not respectively limited and defined”. This condition is perpetuated by the fact wages paid to bonded laborers barely pay for the basic necessities for survival which, coupled with spiraling debts, trap workers in a superexploitative contractual (and even non-contractual) arrangements which can extend for long periods of time and even for multiple generations. There are many forms this exploitation can take, such as the bondage



of tenants to landowners in what is portrayed as legal land lending contracts, seasonal bonded labor or the bondage of women and children.

The International Labour Organization (ILO)'s estimate for forced laborers in the

world today is 20.9 million people. To go in further detail:

- 18.7 million (90%) people are in forced labor in the private sector. Of these, 4.5 million (22%) are in forced sexual exploitation, and 14.2 million (68%) in

(Continued: Global People's War)

carried out by global people's war is the one and only path to global socialism and communism. Thus, the immediate aim of the global proletariat is the development of global people's war and the victory of global new democratic revolution, setting the stage for the immediate development of socialism.

Though some may bemoan in infantile self-interest the pessimistic outlook this sets for the First World, the denial of the significance of global class structures indicates both an unimaginative dogmatism based on a superficial understanding of Marxism and a tired idealism which substitutes voluntarism for historical materialism. Beyond challenging and correcting First Worldist errors within the International Communist Movement, it is the job of revolutionary Marxists in the First World to work as representatives of the global proletariat in order to develop the sort of heterogeneous oppositional coalitions which are both part of the global people's war and new democratic revolution and which can tactically and strategically intervene to preempt the forces of international reaction. The main thing which Third Worldism changes for prac-

tice in the First World is to provide a more accurate and strategic conceptual framework for internationalism in localized work. It does not ask First World Communists to do less; it asks them to do more and with a more advanced understanding of the necessity for global people's war and global new democratic revolution.

Drawing from Lin:

“In the last analysis, whether one dares to wage a tit-for-tat struggle against armed aggression and suppression by the imperialists and their lackeys, whether one dares to fight a people's war against them, means whether one dares to embark on revolution. This is the most effective touchstone for distinguishing genuine from fake revolutionaries.”

This holds true today. Whether one works to support the aims of the proletariat, whether one supports the broad united front against imperialism, global people's war, and global new democratic revolution, indicates the character of one's politics. These are the hallmarks distinguishing modern revisionism from modern revolutionary Marxism.

-Nikolai Brown

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forced labor in activities such as agriculture, construction, domestic work and manufacturing.

- Women and girls represent the greater share of forced labor victims: 11.4 million (55%), as compared to 9.5 million (45%) men and boys.
- Adults are more affected than children; 74% (15.4 million) of victims fall in the age group of 18 years and above, whereas children are 26% of the total (or 5.5 million child victims).
- 2.2 million (10%) work in state-imposed forms of forced labor, for example in prisons under conditions which violate ILO standards, or in work imposed by the state military or by rebel armed forces.

South Asia is believed to have 9.5 million people in forced labor, the majority of who are in debt bondage. These statistics are either ignored or downplayed by government authorities in Nepal, Pakistan and India, making these governments complicit with the business, intentionally or not.

Like other types of labor in capitalism, bonded labor is continuously reinventing itself. While generational bonded labor has decreased with time, new forms of bonded labor are emerging and the number of chronically poor and landless workers that enter debt bondage is increasing. Being landless in countries where half or more of the population is employed in agriculture makes people vulnerable to debt bondage as they have to meet their survival needs.

Recently, as agriculture in South Asia undertook structural change, moving to cash-cropping for example, some impacts were felt on bonded labor itself. With the decline in the agricultural labor force as a result of mechanization, agricultural work has become more and more seasonal. This puts strains on the population working in the primary sector as they have to take advances on their remuneration, which then requires them to work the full season to receive the rest.

Wages for bonded labor are extremely low and the debt often takes whole families to repay, often with children working for free. In India, bonded labor is practiced in agriculture, silk farms and industries, rice mills, salt pans, fisheries, quarries and mines, forest work, match and firework industries, tea and cardamom farming, brick-kilns, shrimp farming, bidi cigarette industry, domestic work, and textiles. Workers involved in power and handlooms,

artificial gems work, shrimp farms, and weaving factories are particularly vulnerable to bondage.

In Pakistan, it is widespread in agriculture, brick kiln work, cotton-seed production, and tanning, mines and carpet industries. A research by Pakistan Institute of Labor Education & Research (PILER) in 2000 estimated that the total number of sharecroppers in debt bondage across the whole of Pakistan was over 1.8 million people, while a 2004 survey of brick kilns in Punjab, Pakistan, by the Federal Bureau of Statistics found that nearly 90 per cent of brick kilns workers were bonded. Another research carried out by PILER in Pakistan indicates that up to 1 million brick kiln workers in Pakistan are bonded. In Nepal it is found in agriculture, brick-kilns, and domestic work. The practice is also found in sweatshops of all three countries.

Indeed, the bourgeois state has introduced laws against bonded labor, but this change in form is not accompanied by a change in content. Laws only modify the superficial and nominal forms of bonded labor, but the coercion through indebtedness survives in more subtle forms, such as contracts modified so as to appear as law conforming. An example of this is the substitution of the Kamaiya system in Nepal where bonded workers would pay off loans, which is now illegal, into the Zirayat system, which is share-cropping under which produce is divided between landlords and tenants, and the latter are required to till additional land without being paid a wage.

Kamaiya has evolved even more in India, where workers who appear to be independent tenants continue to be bonded laborers. Tenants borrow money from their landlord for seeds, fertilizers and other farming costs. These costs add to the share that goes to the landowners effectively rendering the tenants' return insufficient for them to repay the loan, thus bonding them to the landowners. Factors such as the informality of contracts, the illiteracy of those that sign them and subsistence wages enable employers to circumvent existing labor laws binding workers into persistent or repeated debt bondage where at the end of a contract a worker may find that he owes a debt to an employer with whom he has then no option but to enter into a new contract to pay off that debt.

Historically, the work contract established between the employer and head of household required all members of laborers' families to work for the

employers, and individual family members did not need to establish such contracts with the employers. Women and girls are now, however, increasingly bonded in their own right. They are often bonded in domestic work, fish-processing, silk farming, bangle production, carpet making, and weaving industries. Women, in equal numbers to men, also work in quarries. There is also evidence that male emigration from one state of India to another has also pushed women into bondage in commercial agriculture. In Nepal, women under the Haliya system, another bonded labor practice in agriculture in the western hills of the country, often work for moneylender landlords, while their husbands work seasonally in India. The phenomenon of women increasingly being bonded in their own right is commonly referred to as 'feminization of bonded labor'. Recent research also highlights relatively new kinds of bondage, including:

- Girls recruited in spinning mills in India for bonded work in return for their marriage cost. The girls, known as Sumangali, work up to three years before their parents are paid for their labor.
- Young boys trafficked from Bihar, West Bengal and neighboring Nepal, are bonded in zardozi embroidery units in Delhi.
- Increased numbers of children in bondage in domestic work.
- The bonding of multiple wives into prostitution among the Koltas, the lowest caste in the region.



The main cause behind bonded labor, be it urban or rural, is the chronic poverty of South Asia, a result of the imperialist pillaging of the sub-continent in the past hundreds of years. Low incomes, deprivation of skills, education and access to health care, lack of property and social vulnerability caused by many factors are all factors that play into bonded labor. Very often, detrimental loan advances are concealed under contracts of long-term employment dictated by the employers, who have the economic advantage of

owning property. The reserve army of the unemployed also plays its role, scaring workers into the acceptance of such contracts against their will. Needless to say, many workers' wages are far below the legal minimum and barely meet subsistence wages. Coupled with their lack of what is normally called "social capital", that is, social contacts and so on, this situation gives no opportunities to move out of poverty, but at the same time creates profitable opportunities for usurers and other capitalists. As they say, for every loss there's a gain.

In South Asia, chronic poverty manifests as a mostly rural condition. Coincidentally, rural areas are where most of the South Asian population lives. The choices that rural life imposes on families in the subcontinent are very limited, and most are dependent on agriculture. It's for this reason that landless workers are forced into seasonal agricultural production which can easily lead to debt bondage, a phenomenon that repeats itself since the advent of Indian independence from the British Empire, where the vast majority of agricultural laborers were not included in land distribution and wage labor became their only means of subsistence. Since then, the only beneficial land reforms have been practiced either by the Naxalites in their controlled areas, or by the government to pacify an outraged population.



This form of accumulation by dispossession is in effect, as Karl Marx reminds us, "the dissolution of private property based on the labor of its owner. Self-earned private property, that is based, so to say, on the fusing together of the isolated, independent laboring-individual with the conditions of his labor, is supplanted by capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominally free labor of others, i.e., on wage-labor."

On top of class-related chronic poverty, we see episodes of structural racism inducing chronic poverty, especially among marginalized groups such as the Dalits ("untouchables") and indigenous peoples.

The remnants of the caste system and of tribal identities make these groups more vulnerable to poverty and deprivation and, as a consequence, to bonded labor. To contribute to this self-perpetuating poverty, low education and access to free utilities hinder any possibility minorities may have of finding regular employment outside their villages. As a last instance of poverty-induced attacks on the livelihood of workers, we have child labor. Children as young as six are forced to enter bonded labor conditions by their own parents who can't pay for the debt forced on them on their own.

The cornerstone of this situation is an especially unequal relationship existing between workers and capitalists at the advantage of the latter, of which debt is the primary method of control.

The first step towards bonded labor is recruitment. During recruitment, capitalists usually pay loan advances to workers and have the ability to intimidate workers if the contract is broken because this kind of employment is usually local. To further ensure the perpetuation of this arrangement, employers pay only subsistence wages which only barely cover food costs. Moreover, these payments are usually in kind, for example taking the form of credit arrangements with local grocers, making it impossible for workers to even choose what to buy for themselves. To this we add a lack of transparency by employers, who only notify the existence of debts at the end of the workers' work contracts.

Employers may also take advantage of the pervasive illiteracy in South Asian countrysides, having workers authorize contracts they can't read through thumb prints, not giving them a copy and leaving them confused as to what the amount of money they owe is. For migrant laborers, the provision of housing is also a common method of controlling them as they are under constant surveillance and their movements can be more easily restricted. In some unregulated sectors, mostly in isolated work environments and where workers are required to live in work premises; they also face intimidation by security personnel and other armed individuals as a way of controlling them, especially in the brick-kilns industry.

Workers who challenge the employer's debt calculation may also face intimidation or harassment directed at themselves or their families. In Rajasthan, employers have reportedly filed false cases against bonded

laborers who have questioned the employer's reckoning of their earnings, or spread false rumors about the laborer within his community leading to his being ostracized.

South Asian governments are at best indifferent to this cringing situation. Their weak legislation, its failed implementation and the constant deregulations imposed by international formations of capital such as the IMF and the World Bank is part of a possibly intentional policy to maintain South Asian production costs low and compete with the advanced economies of imperialist countries. These international representatives of imperialism call for the reduction of obligations and regulations for imperialist capital and for the liberalization of labor markets, in effect freeing the trans-national movement of capital and the global trade of cheap labor, materials and services, an effective class assault on the working population.

The people who suffer the most from this social arrangement are marginalized groups who, with limited economic opportunities and social prejudice pointed at them, can't sustain good health, attain educational qualifications, or fulfill their human needs which are important for individual mental and physical well-being.

Bonded labor is especially exacerbated by the union of chronic poverty and social discrimination based on caste, ethnicity or religion. Over 90% of bonded laborers are Dalits, minorities, or indigenous as a result of the existing social system of castes. Bottom castes can't perform work of the high castes, they can't access high caste places of worship, can't access the same water sources, can't touch the food high caste persons eat or freely associate with high caste members. In most areas, they cannot sell drinks, food, or products used for worship, limiting their access to economic opportunities.

Dalit communities especially are systematically degraded, humiliated and made servile to high caste people. If they decide to defy these exploitative, discriminatory and humiliating roles, they face social stigma and boycotts which further restricts any opportunity to overcome discrimination and its related social diseases, such as poverty and dependency.

This is not an isolated phenomenon, since 43% of the Indian population falls under low castes, of which 17% are Dalits. Debt bondage is also prevalent amongst minority

Toward a Concrete Class Analysis of the United States

As Samir Amin aptly notes in his critique of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*, in periods of unrest and confusion following the defeat of revolutionary movements, there is a tendency for theories to emerge which lend legitimacy to that unrest and confusion, and which actually portray the resulting opportunism as a viable form of struggle [1]. Amin speaks of course of the autonomist movement and its conception of "multitude," which ultimately rejects class analysis and frames the vast majority of people in the centers of imperialism (including the petty-bourgeoisie and perhaps even some among the bourgeoisie outright) as being potentially capable of building "counter-Empire." This view downplays or ignores the fact that most of the "multitude" materially benefits from "Empire." Among other things, autonomist thinking underlies the vacuous "1% vs. 99%" rhetoric of the Occupy movement. Now it is fair to say that most communists, even in the imperialist core, reject autonomism. Yet a similar opportunism underlies the analysis of most self-proclaimed Marxists in the First World and particularly in the United States.

(Continued: Bonded Labor)

ethnic groups in India and Nepal, such as the Adivasis in India and the Tharus in Nepal. Refugees and internally displaced people are also particularly vulnerable to being trafficked into bondage. Afghan children are reported to be working as bonded laborers in carpet factories and brick kilns in the North West Frontier province of Pakistan while Nepali children, displaced to various urban centers due to armed conflict, have been subsequently trapped in debt-bondage.

Another group discriminated in South Asia is that which holds up half of the sky, women. On top of being discriminated in regard to inheritance and decision making, restricted on their movement and subjugated to the male, women are also discriminated in the labor market. They are not remunerated equally and are systematically abused and harassed in the workplace. When they get off work, they are burdened by additional unpaid work within the household. The combined effects of low education levels, work place



The endless refrain of the typical communist in the U.S., either explicit or implied, is that we need to redefine the concept of the proletariat. Marx's conception was too narrow, it is said. After all, what Marx considered to be the proletariat — the most revolutionary class under capitalism — hardly makes up a majority of the population in the U.S.(!). This is certainly true. The hard question we need to ask, however, is why? Why "redefine" what consti-

tutes a proletariat? Do we have any concrete reason, any evidence upon which we should make this redefinition?

Certainly, we cannot in principle be opposed to expanding our conceptions of who is revolutionary in a capitalist world. There were many "Marxists" in the lead-up to the Chinese revolution who felt that the peasantry in China could not help lead a revolution, that the Communist Party should only organize among the industrial workers. Mao Zedong saw through this "left" opportunism as an attitude which ultimately held back revolution. Mao correctly identified that in semi-feudal, semi-colonial countries such as China, the peasants were the greatest potential ally to the proletariat. This was not an arbitrary belief. The early 20th century in China was a time of peasant revolts, and Mao observed spontaneous peasant uprisings where land was seized from landlords and redistributed. Clearly, the peasants had revolutionary energy, an energy that was eventually tapped by the Chinese Communist Party with Mao's leadership, leading to a successful revolution and the establishment of socialism in China.

discrimination, exclusion from family decision making processes and a lack of familial property rights increases South Asian women's vulnerability to labor exploitation and dependency, and thus makes them susceptible to bondage, to the point women are bonded by their husbands into prostitution, embedded within the system of polygamy and bride procurement.

Women may then be sent to work in brothels, or alternatively 'loaned' to brothel owners, where their earnings are shared between the brothel owner and their husband. The bonded woman is not allowed to leave the brothel until the debt of her husband has been cleared. The bride price itself can be considered an advance on her labor. Extreme economic poverty and social discrimination excluding people from certain professions and businesses, pushes the socially excluded into bondage.

The continuation of slavery in the form of bonded labor in South Asia is a demonstration of the continuing failure of capitalism to fix problems on its own. Such

failure is a direct product of the logic of capitalism, the logic of production for profit, which defies national constitutions and penal codes.

Bonded labor in South Asia is a product of poverty and social exclusion. Those who are enslaved are desperately poor with no assets other than themselves to sell, as Marx characterized capitalism 150 years ago. Bonded slaves are predominantly from marginalized groups, with various studies estimating that around 90% of bonded laborers come from these. The continuation and normalization of these slavish arrangements establish a culture of toleration for abuses of the most extreme kind, including slavery, to be perpetrated against vulnerable people from these sections of society.

If bonded labor is to be eradicated in South Asia, capitalism and the logic of accumulation must be toppled.

- Klaas Velja



Additionally, an idea which was perhaps implied in Marx yet has only been fully elaborated more recently is the notion of the gender division of labor between productive and *reproductive* work in capitalism. There is a whole host of work which needs to be done to reproduce the worker, i.e. to keep the workers showing up to work each day. Examples include cooking meals, doing laundry, taking care of children, etc. These are costs that might otherwise have to be incurred by capitalists, yet in the drive for greater profit, they have been shifted primarily onto (poor) women. There are thus *billions* of women around the globe who, regardless of whether or not they are *directly* involved in the production of surplus value, are nevertheless doing a great deal of necessary reproductive labor, and they do so generally without any pay. These women are potentially revolutionary. We may even note that there are members of the servant class worldwide, whose labor is wholly *unproductive*, but who nonetheless live in proletarian or proletarian-like conditions because of their subjection to various forms of oppression which are definitely tied to the capitalist mode of production (e.g. sex workers). These strata among the servant class may also be revolutionary.

But in *every* one of these cases where we might expand our conceptions of who is revolutionary from those of Marx and early Marxists, we do so as a result of concrete analysis of concrete conditions, by using the Marxist *method*. We come to the conclusions we do because we make real investigation into people's relationships to the means of production, into the conditions in which people live and work, and into the sentiments that people generally have. This is *not* what most U.S. communists typically mean when they insist that the conception of the "proletariat" must be redefined. What is meant is that the

"proletariat" should be defined in such a way as to include most or all U.S. workers *regardless* of concrete relationships to the means of production. No justification is given for this, other than an appeal to the abstract principle that the majority of people in a capitalist country *must* be revolutionary.

What this reflects is an unwillingness to answer the fundamental questions. Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? Seeking real answers to these questions, based on materialist analysis of imperialism today, may lead us to some difficult conclusions. But it is our duty to answer them, because the answers to these fundamental questions are what will guide effective practice. Ultimately we must break from the opportunism and confusion that dominates "left" discourse today in the U.S., which seeks in large part to legitimate the status quo, and instead move toward a concrete class analysis of the United States.

Who are our enemies?

Undoubtedly one of Mao Zedong's most valuable contributions is *Oppose Book Worship*. The overarching theme of this text is that the study of books, while it can be important, is no replacement for concrete investigation. Rather than mindlessly regurgitate words and phrases from our favorite authors, we must oppose book worship and instead "inquire into everything" to determine what is really going on in the world. What Mao reminds us when he insists, "No investigation, no right to speak!" is that Marxism is a *method* rather than a particular set of conclusions. If one begins at the outset proclaiming things to be the case merely because some book said so, before making a real investigation, one is bound to come to wrong conclusions.

Today, it is clear that there are some specific conclusions drawn in Marx's texts

that must be scrapped if we apply the Marxist method to our contemporary world. We can all agree that the world bourgeoisie are still of course our primary enemy. However, an idea contained in Marx that no longer bears fruit is that workers in a capitalist world are *necessarily* exploited. Certainly, the *vast majority* of the world's workers must be exploited in order to facilitate the profits of capitalists. But is it possible that some workers' wages have risen to the point where those workers are not only not exploited, but are in fact *net-exploiters themselves*? A Marxist analysis of today's world reveals that this is indeed the case. Moreover, in the centers of capitalist-imperialism (e.g. the United States), the proportion of workers who are net-exploiters is very large.

We live in the age of imperialism. Capital is mobile, and it is global; capital moves wherever it will generate the most profit. What this means is that capitalist-imperialist countries such as the United States export capital to the global peripheries (commonly referred to as the "Third World") in order to take advantage of the cheap labor there and expand profit margins. The low standard of living in the peripheries that enables these higher profit rates is continually reinforced through economic relations between the imperialist core and the periphery, and often through force.

As a result of this capital export, there is a global transfer of wealth occurring between the peripheries and the imperialist core. This is a product both of unequal exchange in trade, and also of the vast differences in wages between imperialist countries and the Third World (the ratio is around 11 to 1). As Zak Cope demonstrates in his book *Divided World Divided Class*, when one analyzes the relations between the core and periphery using Marxist political economy, one finds that



there is *trillions* of dollars worth of value being extracted from the peripheries and appropriated by imperialist countries each year. At the end of the day, greater than 95% of the profits gleaned by imperialist countries can be accounted for by exploitation of Third World labor [2]. This is of course an estimate, and an estimate made at the level of all imperialist countries together rather than individual countries. We must also remember to oppose book worship ourselves and not substitute appeals to Cope's book for real investigation. Nonetheless, the conclusions reached in *Divided World Divided Class* must certainly *inform* our investigation of class in the United States.

The United States is hardly an atypical imperialist country; in fact it is the dominant imperialist country. It is fair to say, therefore, that the vast majority of profits gleaned by U.S. capitalists are accounted for by exploitation of labor in the peripheries. Given that this is the case, is it possible that the high wages in the United States are supplemented by the exorbitant profits extracted from Third World workers? This is precisely the case. In order to believe that the high wages in the U.S. are sourced anywhere other than surplus value generated in the peripheries, one would have to believe that U.S. workers are producing *many times* more surplus value than Third World workers, for which there is absolutely no evidence. In fact, as already mentioned, the evidence points to the exact opposite conclusion. In reality, the high wages and standard of living of U.S. workers cannot be accounted for by the value that U.S. workers produce, and thus can only be predicated upon value produced *somewhere else*, i.e. in the global peripheries.

To unpack this in more detail, we can invoke the concept of "net exploitation." Net exploitation occurs when the payment a worker receives for an hour of work is *greater* than what an hour of socially average (abstract) labor produces. For instance, if I am a net-exploiter, I can go to the marketplace with my one hour's worth of wages, and purchase something that perhaps took *three hours* of abstract labor to produce. On the other hand, if I was exploited, i.e. if surplus value was being extracted from me by capitalists, it might for example take me *six hours* of work to be able to afford something that took three hours of abstract labor to produce. The specific numbers are not important here; what matters is that the net-exploiter is

paid more in a given time than what socially average labor produces in that time, while exploited workers are paid less. Thus the net-exploiter can afford privileges that are simply not accessible to exploited workers.

The existence of the net-exploiter fundamentally depends upon imperialism. The only way for a population to be paid more than the abstract value of labor is if the wages of workers are supplemented by exploitation of the peripheries. We can also see this when we approach from a different perspective. The conception that many First World Marxists have of "socialism" is basically the extension of middle-class living standards to the whole population, indeed to the *whole world's population*. This is, however, impossible. If the whole world consumed at the level that the average Amerikan does, we would need several Earths' worth of resources to sustain the current population. In other words, the way of life of the net-exploiters would be *impossible* without the subjugation and exploitation of laborers in the peripheries. This is not to say that net-exploiters cannot experience oppression. Indeed, there are many forms of oppression tied to the capitalist mode of production which even net-exploiters do experience. However, in the final instance, socialism is not in the interest of the net-exploiters, because if a socialist revolution happened today in the U.S., the material living standards of the net-exploiters would *decrease*.

What portion of the U.S. population is made up of net-exploiters? To answer this question, we need to know the abstract value of labor, i.e. how much value socially average labor produces in a given amount of time. Nikolai Brown has calculated that the abstract value of labor is roughly \$20,000 per worker per year [3]. This gives us a first-approximation of the size of the exploiting population in the United States: anyone who makes more than \$20,000 a year is a net-exploiter, accounting for the vast majority of U.S. workers. That is to say, humanity produces about \$20,000 of value for each worker every year. The only way for a portion of workers to make more than this value in wages is if workers somewhere else are making *less*. In other words, the living standards of those in the U.S. making more than \$20,000 a year are *dependent upon* low wages in the peripheries. And this wage differential is continually reinforced through economic relations between the imperialist world and the peripheries, and

through force. To be plain: the living standards of most U.S. workers depend upon imperialism. Once again, we cannot expect these net-exploiters to be in favor of socialist revolution, because no more than a relative handful of people will rise up, fight, and potentially die for the institution of a society which would defeat imperialism and thus materially *decrease* their living standards.

Thus we can begin to formulate an answer to the question: who are our enemies? In the United States, it is not only the bourgeoisie and what is traditionally considered the petty-bourgeoisie who are enemies of the proletariat. In truth, the majority of the U.S. population fundamentally benefits from imperialism and thus they are, on the whole, enemies of the proletariat at large.

Who are our friends?

Readers may note that our conception of net exploitation still admits of the possibility that there are millions of people within the U.S. who are proletarian or at least are potential allies of the world proletariat. This is true. For example, a case study of undocumented migrant workers in Los Angeles published in *Monthly Review* found that men among undocumented workers were making an average of \$13,308 a year, and women were making an average of just \$6,869 a year. Moreover, most of these workers were involved in productive labor (e.g. working in textile and fabric mills) [4]. Further still, since these workers are undocumented, they do not receive additional benefits from the government, so it is unlikely that they receive much in value beyond their wages. By the standards we have already articulated, these workers are proletarian, especially the women among the undocumented workers. Additionally, in 2011 the percentage of Black workers making below the abstract value of labor was at least *double* that of white workers, indicating that there may still be a sizable Black proletariat in the United States [5].

We must also remember that, as Mao Zedong articulated, in oppressed nations, even those who are not exploited can still be allies of the proletariat. The U.S. is a multi-national state, with a number of oppressed nations existing within its borders. The Xican@ nation, the Black nation, and the Indian nations are the primary of these. Millions of people in U.S. experience national oppression, and by and large they count among the potential allies of the proletariat.

In general, we can see that the following groups in the U.S. are friends of the world proletariat:

- A small but not insignificant stratum of workers in the U.S. who make less than the abstract value of labor, primarily located in the oppressed nations (e.g. the Xican@ nation, the Black nation, and the Indian nations) [6];
- Those within the U.S. who may not be exploited but experience national oppression generally.

Additionally, we may be able to count on a small stratum of class traitors from the exploiting classes in the U.S. to ally themselves with the exploited masses of the world. However, the primary base of the allies of the proletariat will be found in the above mentioned groups.



It is important to know who and where our friends are, even if the number of friends in the U.S. is not large enough to potentiate revolution in the near future. This is because, even in imperialist countries such as the United States, we need a mass base to be effective in carrying out important tasks. As Nikolai Brown has noted on this website, the primary tasks for us in the First World include organizing a mass movement to undermine imperialism where we live and thus help support revolutionary movements around the world. Additionally, we must work to start building subjective conditions that will be conducive to future domestic revolutionary struggles [7]. We should add to this that we must build a mass movement to oppose the fascist tendencies which are likely to emerge in the U.S.

As Andrew Kliman demonstrates in his book *The Failure of Capitalist Production*, the overall rate of profit in the United States has been falling since the 1950's and has never recovered. This falling rate of profit was the ultimate source of the last economic crisis, and certainly now in this economic "malaise," profit rates show little sign of going up. What can be expected as a result is widespread austerity in an attempt to salvage profit margins, some of which we are already seeing. This has potential to re-proletarianize segments of the U.S. population, but it also has a very frightening potential. Members of the Euro-Amerikan nation, with its long settler-colonial history, are unlikely to turn to communism as response to being removed from their position as net-exploiters. When a population that has essentially never

known anything but prosperity at the expense of others faces dethronement from that position of privilege, extremely reactionary movements tend to emerge. It is likely that many Euro-Amerikans will turn to fascism in the coming years, just as a significant stratum of workers did in Germany and Italy after WWI, and just as some workers are today in parts of Europe. To prepare for this, we will need a strong communist movement in the United States, and we simply will not be able to build this movement if we do not know who and where our friends and enemies are.

Conclusion

While more thorough investigation is needed to come to a truly concrete class analysis of the U.S., hopefully this article provides insight about where to look and

what to look for. In general, the number of enemies within the United States is much larger than most First World Marxists are willing to admit. Nevertheless, there are friends of the world proletariat to be found in the U.S., largely in the oppressed nations such as the Xican@ nation, the Black nation, and the Indian nations. Although they are not the majority of the population, our task is to organize among the oppressed in the United States to undermine Amerikan imperialism and support proletarian struggles around the world, to build subjective conditions conducive to future revolutionary movements, and to counter a rising fascist movement which is likely to emerge in the United States in the coming years.

-Morton Ester

Notes

1. Samir Amin, *Empire and Multitude*. <http://monthlyreview.org/2005/10/01/empire-and-multiplicity>
2. See Zak Drabczyk's summary of Cope's work, *Evidence For Global Value Transfer*, <http://anti-imperialism.com/2013/08/12/evidence-for-global-value-transfer/>
3. Nikolai Brown, *Calculating the Value of Labor*. <http://anti-imperialism.com/2013/02/19/calculating-the-value-of-labor/>
4. Richard D. Vogel, *Harder Times: Undocumented Workers and the U.S. Informal Economy*. <http://monthlyreview.org/2006/07/01/harder-times-undocumented-workers-and-the-u-s-informal-economy>
5. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011*. <http://www.census.gov>
6. Readers may note that I did not include white workers in this list. While I recognize that there are white workers who may be exploited or live in proletarian-like conditions, they are very few in number. Moreover, even poor white workers, given the Euro-Amerikan nation's long history of settler-colonialism, tend to be very reactionary. The fact that *some* poor whites who could be radicalized probably exist does not mean that they are a primary base for building communist mass organization in the U.S.
7. Nikolai Brown, *Dear RAIM, What to Do in the First World?* <http://anti-imperialism.com/2013/07/01/dear-raim-what-to-do-in-the-first-world/>



What is Class Hegemony?



Black Panther liberation school, a main instrument of counter-hegemony in African-American communities.

Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity. – Vladimir Lenin, “What is to Be Done?”

If we had to situate this quote by Lenin in a historical context, we would explain that what Lenin was doing in 1902 with “What is to Be Done?” was examining the methods and objectives of the Russian Social-Democracy, which at the time was blindly following (tailing) the “spontaneity” of the masses. Lenin, against this opportunist tendency, aimed to transform the movement by rooting its practice in Marxist theory, that is, a revolutionary practice backed by a concrete analysis of current events. It is in this light that the concept of hegemony arose.

The term hegemony was first used by the Russian Social-Democracy, specifically by Plekhanov to indicate the need for an alliance between peasantry and proletariat led by the working class as the only viable means to overthrow Tsarism, creating a national path for the liberation of all oppressed social groups. The Russian working class, according to the Russian Social-Democrats, in alliance with the peasantry, had to lead the bourgeois-democratic revolution against the Tsarist monarchy. By becoming the hegemonic force in this revolution, the working class, despite being a minority in the Russian Empire, would have been able to win the support of the majority of the population.

While for Plekhanov and Lenin hegemony was the general strategy for a revolution in the Russian Empire, Gramsci extends the

concept of hegemony to include the practice of the capitalist class and its repressive and ideological state apparatuses, exploring the ways in which the bourgeoisie maintains its power. In his inquiries, he makes an important distinction between the types of power utilized to maintain class rule: domination and leadership.

A social group can, indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this is indeed one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.
– Antonio Gramsci

Building on the groundwork laid by Lenin, Gramsci transforms hegemony from strategy to theory, developing the idea that leadership is a necessary condition to achieve political power. Every ruling class is able to exercise varying degrees of control over people through methods of coercion and persuasion as a means to perpetuate their political power. With Gramsci, the Marxist-Leninist theory of hegemony becomes an explanation of the political and ideological relationship that guarantees its political power from being questioned, to be coupled with the theory of domination, or the brute use of coercive force by a ruling class to silence its enemies.

The proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the population against capitalism and the bourgeois state. – Antonio Gramsci

As revealed by the Russian and Chinese revolutionary experiences, the only way for the working class to become hegemonic in the classical Leninist sense is by taking into account the interests of other oppressed groups of society and combining their interests with its own. With Bolsheviks in practice and Gramsci in theory, we have a break with the Second International’s orthodoxy of social conflict as an opposition between two classes only,

with a resulting complex model of society involving other classes and social groups, such as national groups, oppressed genders, etc. The result is a struggle to strengthen the alliance of the oppressed and to weaken the alliance of the bourgeoisie in order to shift the balance of forces in the working class’s favor, under the leadership of a revolutionary party.

This alliance, however, need not be organized on a strict class basis, for a class wouldn’t be able to become hegemonic if it confined itself only to class interests, a revolutionary class must take into account the popular demands and the already existing struggle of the people which don’t have a pure class character and don’t raise directly out of relations of production. Among these struggles we find those for national liberation, the women’s rights movement, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the student movement, and so on. All these movements have specific qualities not reducible to class struggle, albeit related to them. Thus hegemony has a national-popular dimension as well as a class dimension. The fight over leadership and hegemony, in Gramscian terms, is a social war of position.



Black Panthers and the Little Red Book.

For some examples of this struggle for leadership, we can look at the Black Panther Party and the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde.

The Black Panthers would organize clinics which provided comprehensive health care for their community. To pay for these free services, volunteers would solicit funds from businessmen, churches, and social clubs, in addition to making their own individual donations. With a functioning free community health program, the community begins to see that it is possible to receive professional, competent, and, above all, preventative medical help with-

out paying any money for it and, most importantly, they begin to ask questions and to organize themselves to change existing health services so that they truly serve the people.

The Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné, during its struggle for independence from Portuguese imperialism, mingled with the Guinean population: PAIGC troops would help the local population to grow crops with better farming techniques, tilling the land when not fighting side by side with the people. PAIGC also set up a country-wide bazaar trade system that made goods available for prices much lower than those of colonial shops, and set up hospital stations to give medical care to the populace, relying on Soviet and Swedish medical supplies. In this way, the Guinean population created a network of institutions independent and hostile to the existing colonial ones.

This is the same message revolutionaries have sent out to the population as the occasion presented itself:

*Organize safe teams, martial art classes
Get to the gun range and make your aim accurate
Self defense is a must by any tactic
Security protocol, make it a daily practice.
- Stic.man of Dead Prez*

It must be kept in mind by any revolutionary organization that whenever bourgeois hegemony is threatened, the bourgeoisie will try to restore it with an extensive reorganization of society, and we have an example of this in the triumph of neoliberalism. The bourgeoisie has to act through the state to transform the socioeconomic structure from above, since they don't have the active participation of the population, as these transformations usually come in response to demands by anti-hegemonic forces. In fact, these demands

may be granted just so that these forces and popular struggles are dealt with. To combat this problem inherent in spontaneity a revolutionary party must always take an active, rather than passive, approach to revolution founded on the continual extension of class and popular struggles.

To create a counter-hegemony, a revolutionary socialist party has to work with the complex system of relations between classes and social forces, dominated by the struggle between capital and labor. In concrete terms, these relations are embodied in organizations and institutions such as churches, unions, the media, cultural associations, schools, political parties, etc. The institutions which have a monopoly on coercion, also known as repressive state apparatuses, make up the state. The social relations and the organizations which embody them found outside of the state are called civil society. Civil society is the sphere of class struggles and of popular-democratic struggles. Thus it is the sphere in which a dominant social group organizes consent and leadership. It is also the sphere where the subordinate social groups may organize their opposition and construct an alternative hegemony, a counter-hegemony.

Bourgeois political power in the sphere of civil society and its hegemony grows out of their control over the sphere of production. This control over the production of surplus value isn't static nor monolithic, and since the days of the infancy of capitalism it has been contested by workers in their struggle over conditions of work, over terms for the introduction of new machines, over working time, etc. A preparatory phase always has to precede the conquest of political power, in which Marxist-Leninists have to expand their leadership to labor unions, student unions, social clubs, and so on. Knowing that coercive political power is what armors civil society, Marxist-Leninists understand that

the takeover of the state is a decisive step, but only part of the transition to socialism.

Gramsci defined civil society as a system of "fortresses and earthworks" behind the state. This is accurate because civil society is where the war of position between socialists and capitalist hegemons takes place. The war of movement in Tsarist Russia, the takeover of state power in a single historical moment that was possible because of the high levels of power concentration in the Russian Empire, is impossible in countries with a well developed civil society. Revolution today is always a process of expanding the counter-hegemony of the working class, of building up a new historic bloc, and can't be broken down to the single moment when state power passes from one class to another.



Storming of the Winter Palace, 1917.

The transition to socialism is hence two processes: the growth of working-class counter-hegemony, and the conquest of political power.

- Klaas Velja



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